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MYRRA by **David Anthony Kraft**

and: the conclusion of THE SECOND TRIP  
by **Robert Silverberg**

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**JUNK PATROL**  
by **TED WHITE**

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# amazing

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**SEPTEMBER, 1971**

**Vol. 45, No. 3**

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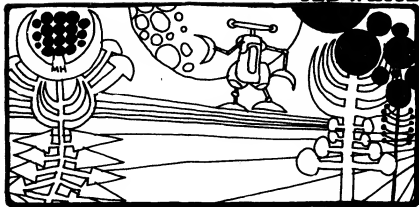
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## EDITORIAL

What happens when two concepts cherished by science fiction meet in a head-on collision?

The intelligent technological development of communications and transportation has long been an unquestioned tenet of sf. Not simply because we have tended to view ongoing technological development as inevitable—which we have—but also because of its *philosophical* importance. The concept of the Planet Earth as a single political entity, of one race—Humanity—united for common good, meeting global problems without territorial chauvenism, has long appealed to our future-minded idealism. And this basic goal is possible only with the development of cheap, practical communication and transportation. Isolationism and regional parochialism can flourish only in the absence of these twin factors.

Likewise, the advancement of aviation and the development of space travel have gone hand in hand, closely linked since aviation's pioneer days paralleled those of rocketry.

However, as sf people—writers and readers—have nurtured their growing realization of mankind's common purposes

and concomittant planetary problems, we have also come to accept the systems precepts which are now being trumpeted as "Ecology." Longer than any other segment of the populace, we have been aware of the fact that ours is a "Spaceship Earth," a closed system differing from the contained environment of, say, a space-station only in degree and in complexity. We sf people are, by nature, "futurists." We have projected trends—extrapolated—and asked many times that ageless question: "If this goes on—?" We, almost alone in all the world, have sought to discover the consequences in Tomorrow of the things being done Today.

Now, in the decade-long United States SST program, comes the clash. Another technological step forward in transportation—vs. ecology.

As I write this, the Senate defeat of the SST program is only days past, following on the heels of one of the most massive attempts by friends and foes of the SST program to sell their points of view to Congress and the nation.

I find the defeat of the SST deeply disturbing in a number of ways, not the

(Continued on page 123)

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# WHAT TIME DO YOU CALL THIS?

---

## BOB SHAW

Illustrated by MIKE HINGE

*Professor Kincade did not believe in the Doctrine of Infinite Redundancy. Abe Short didn't believe in anything but the fast buck. They were both wrong . . .*

**A**BE SHORT had locked his bedroom door, and was doing something he did not want anybody else to know about, when he received the worst shock of his life.

One moment he was absolutely alone—and a split-second later there was a mad scientist standing beside the tallboy, blinking at him through pebble-lensed glasses.

Although he had never seen a mad scientist before, Abe's nimble wits enabled him to decide the little man's profession almost immediately. The first clue was that the stranger was wearing an odd-looking metallic belt outside a shapeless tweed jacket, an adornment which lent a definite air of eccentricity to his untidy ensemble.

The second clue was the manner of his arrival. Nobody could have slipped into the bedroom by conventional means without Abe knowing about it. The little man had definitely *materialized*, with a popping sound and the suggestion of an electrical crackle, and Abe had even felt a gust of displaced

air. Only a mad scientist would have done such a thing.

Abe set his binoculars down on the window ledge and pretended he had not been studying the movements of the guard at the bank across the avenue. Now that his system was recovering from the shock, he decided that the intruder would have to be questioned closely and precisely about his identity, motives and method of entry.

"Waddaya?" he demanded angrily. "Waddaya?"

"How interesting," the mad scientist said. "I expected this apartment to be empty in the beta timestream. I'm astonished that anybody would pay two-fifty a month for such inferior accommodation."

Abe sensed he had been insulted. "Lay off the accommodation. You better tell me how you got in here."

"I was here all along. . ."

"You was *not*!"

". . . but in the alpha timestream," the little man continued calmly. "I used the devices built into this belt to exert

a chronomotive impulse in a lateral direction, and transferred myself from alpha time to beta time. The nomenclature is purely arbitrary, of course. If you would prefer it you are free to think of your timestream as alpha and mine as beta."

Abe shook his head impatiently. "I don't get it."

"There is no reason why you should, but as I will be in this timestream for just a few minutes on this initial visit it can't do any harm to let you share my triumph. My name, by the way, is Kincade." The little man pulled a drawer a short distance out of the tallboy and sat on the edge of it. "You're familiar with the theory of multiple probability worlds?"

"Huh?"

"It used to be thought that there were a great number of slightly divergent timestreams generated by decision-points. You know the idea—that in another existence Columbus turned back before he discovered America, that in yet another Germany won the war, and so on. Some quite eminent thinkers held to this theory, even though it leads inescapably to the Doctrine of Infinite Redundancy—which is, of course, utter nonsense."

"Huh?"

"Well, it follows from the theory that there is another universe identical to this one in every detail except that..." Kincade looked around with magnified eyes, "... the cigarette burn on the edge of this tallboy is a hundredth of an inch further to the left. Another with it further to the left again. And another with it a little smaller, or a different shape. You expend billions of universes simply catering for the billions of possible vagaries of one little





cigarette burn. It doesn't make sense, does it?"

"No," Abe was emphatic.

"What I've done is to rationalize the whole theory. And I've proved that there are only two probability worlds, or timestreams, both generating from a single vital decision-point in our history. A little research in this timestream should reveal what this all-important event was, but that can be done on my next visit.

"Now, if you will excuse me." Kincade moved his hand to a switch which grew out of the buckle of his gleaming belt, but he did not succeed in pressing it.

Abe darted across the room and hit him on top of the skull with the only solid object available, which in this case happened to be the binoculars. Luckily—from Abe's point of view—they were built to a robust naval specification and were able to put Kincade to sleep in a satisfactory manner. He trussed the unconscious man with cord, then removed the metal belt from around his waist. It was heavy, warm to the touch, and throbbed with a pseudo-life of its own.

ONE HOUR LATER a small cigar store, half a block away from the bank, opened up for the day's business. Abe, who was watching through the slats of his blind, saw morning sunlight flash on the store's glass door, and he nodded contentedly.

"See that cigar store over there?" he said. "It sells cigars, all right, but that ain't all that goes on in there. The guy who owns it just happens to run the local book. Waddaya think of that?"

Kincade, who was in the process of

recovering consciousness, retched weakly.

Abe accepted this as an adequate response to a rhetorical question. "Know what's gonna happen next? About ten minutes from now the guard on that hick bank across the avenue is gonna drift along and lay a few bets the way he does every Friday morning. And that's when I move in to collect. Waddaya think of that, professor?"

Kincade's lips moved this time, but no sound came out.

"I got a good car outside," Abe continued, "but now I got a better get-away—thanks to you. I hope your head don't hurt too much, professor."

He clucked sympathetically at Kincade, and began putting on his working rig. This consisted of a hand-knitted blue sweater with a special roll neck which could be pulled right up over his face, and a shoulder holster containing a realistic toy Luger. He slipped a jacket on over it, put the metallic belt around his waist and picked up the canvas duffle bag he used for transporting large sums of money.

"What. . . What are you going to do?" Kincade mumbled.

"I'm gonna rob a bank."

"But my chronomotive device!"

"You mean this belt? That's my get-away, professor. You was enjoying yourself with all the doubletalk a while back. The only reason you gave me all that stuff was you thought I couldn't understand it, but I'm not dumb, professor. All I got to do is lift the money, get out of the bank, then throw this switch and I disappear into another timestream where nobody robbed the bank—so I'm not wanted. I'll have all that bread and nobody chasing me to get it back."

Kincade shook his head. "It may not work for you."

"Waddaya mean?" Abe scowled at him, took a deep breath and moved the switch on the belt. He felt a curious sensation, like a mild electric shock, and Kincade disappeared. For an instant Abe thought he had been outwitted by the little man, then he noticed the bedspread was a different color. He was in the other timestream. A sound of movement came from the other room so, without wasting any time, Abe clicked the switch to its original position, felt the strange tingling sensation, and grinned as Kincade reappeared on the room's only chair.

"I knew it would work, professor." He patted the belt with proprietary pride. "I'm gonna make a fortune with this gadget."

Kincade struggled ineffectually with his bonds. "That wasn't what I meant. Your personal world-lines may not be sufficiently divergent to enable you to capitalize on. . ."

"Give it up, professor—the big words don't fool me." Abe closed the door of his bedroom and went out into the corridor. He had spent longer than he had intended in the apartment and he would have to hurry to be ready for action as soon as the bank guard had left.

The first thing he saw on emerging into the morning sunlight was the guard's blue uniform disappearing into the cigar store, which meant he had already lost a couple of minutes. Abe danced an impatient jig on the avenue's central island as the traffic flow prevented him from getting across, then came the realization that there was really no need to hurry. After all, he

had the bank-robber's ideal companion—the instant getaway.

He reached the sidewalk, strolled casually into the bank's shady, old-fashioned porch and looked through the inner door. There were no customers in, and the four clerks behind the counter were all the sort he liked to deal with—not so young that they might be reckless, not so old that they might have crazy notions about loyalty. He pulled his collar up over his face, whipped out the toy Luger and shouldered his way through the door.

"This is a hold-up," he announced ritually. "Fill the bag up with used bills and nobody's gonna get hurt." He slung his duffle over the wrought iron grill, gestured threateningly with the plastic gun and noted with approval that the clerks were anxious to be helpful. All four began cramming the bag with money, and one even went as far as going into the strong room for extra supplies.

Abe waited as long as he dared, but was prudent enough to realize that he had to get clear of the bank before jumping into the alternative timestream. Popping up in the same bank in alpha time with a sack full of loot and a gun in his hand could get him in big trouble. He might get shot before anybody noticed he had not committed a robbery.

"That's enough," he snapped, as forcefully as was possible through the moist wool of his collar. He took back the now-bulging duffle, walked quickly to the door and slipped out into the porch. His car was waiting across the avenue and the traffic lanes were clear. Slinging the bag over his shoulder, Abe loped across the sidewalk—just as a

(Continued on page 19)

*A sixteenth-century frontiersman, confronted with the daily routine of any municipal sanitation department, would think himself surrounded by miracles of machinery and magic. Would a prosaic farmer's life—on the moon—strike us any differently?*

# JUNK PATROL

## TED WHITE

Illustrated by DAVID COOK

**T**HE SUN WAS WARM ON my back as I stepped out into the Lunar day. I drew a breath of the rich air, full of the sweet smell of fresh-mown grass, and stared out across the fields at the desolation beyond. Life and death—the line between them was as clean as that.

"Sam?"

I turned as Rose came to the open door, and the old bitterness twisted for a moment in my gut. I grunted. "Yuh?"

"You're just going to walk out like—that?"

I looked at her for a moment, standing there looking so damned pretty, then raised my eyes away from her. The sun was a glowing blob in the plioilm sky, and when I dropped my eyes again green dots were dancing in front of them. "I'll be back," I said. I didn't feel like talking to her. It made my mouth taste bad.

I couldn't see her expression, and I didn't care. I heard the door snick shut, and the hiss of the safety seals. I spun on my foot, my boot gouging into the fragile turf. *Fresh-mown. Shit.*

I got the pogo out of the shed,

checked the charge on its batteries, and strapped myself onto it. The fan kicked up the grass clippings the rake had missed, and then jumped me into the air, the house dwindling to a flat, slate-gray cube far below.

It took an hour to reach Leytown, and I was sweating when I parked the pogo in the municipal lot behind the courthouse. I had just finished connecting up to the charger when Joe Leibner dropped in. I went over and helped him with his hookup, mostly so we could go in together.

"How's it, Sam?" he asked.

"The usual, Joe," I said. He wasn't the kind of man to ask me outright, but we'd both said all that was necessary.

"Wonder what they've got for us today?" he said, leading the way up the back steps to the courthouse.

"Junk," I said, forcing a laugh. It was always junk.

Five men were there already. We sat around and small-talked, waiting for the other three. The last one in was Jerome Podwill, our patrol commander.

He keyed in the infomat and a big chart appeared on the wall-screen. He did some pointing with his finger and reeled off the appropriate figures. It was standard stuff, and pointless. We already knew what we needed to know, and the computers—the same ones which had put together the chart—knew all the rest. But Podwill gets a charge out of playing patrol commander, so he went through the whole routine, while the rest of us sat out our varying degrees of boredom.

He finished with his standard line: "Okay, men, that's it! Let's get crack-ing!" Joe gave me his crooked smile and shook his head, but I found myself ambling for the door more slowly than usual—just sort of nudging myself along and letting the weak gravity do the rest. Podwill has that effect on people, anyway.

We took the usual antiseptic showers and pulled on our body suits, looking for all the world like a bunch of women pulling on their stockings. It usually cracks me up when Lutu goes into his "Have I got my seams straight, guys?" routine, but this time I added a mental *Bravo* when Podwill said, "Knock it off, will ya, Lew?"

"Yeah, Lew, this is serious business we got here," Joe threw in, just to add to the general merriment, but it left me cold.

I checked out Joe's tanks and he checked mine. We go by the buddy system, which is usually by rotation, but we'd broken Podwill of applying the rotation to us a long time back. Joe and I get along well; we're tuned to the same wavelength or something. When your life is involved, that counts for something.

The horsing around is natural, I



COOK

guess, when you're getting ready to go out in space with no more protection than a suit of thin elastic and an air helmet. It's a way of relieving some of the tension.

The municipal ferry looks like a cross between one of those old jumbo cargo planes—the kind with the twin tail and the huge central fuselage—and the kind of rockets you see pictured in the old sf pulps of a hundred years ago. It has this big door at the rear, and close up to it a man looks four inches tall. We piled in through the crew's hatch, though, settling into the dozen seats behind the control section. Rusty came back and said "Hi, guys," to us, and that was all we saw of him for the duration.

The ferry is a real bastard machine. Within the envelope of our plastic sky, it flies like a plane. That doesn't take much power, with the air density what it is, and the weak Lunar gravity. Rusty just fed the rockets every so often and we almost glided up to Leytown Hole.

Above the Hole, it's a different story. You're in free space.

Rusty's a good pilot. Sure, he has computers telling him everything he has to do, but there's a human touch to piloting—a finesse the computers don't have, and will never have. When we've gotten Sanger as a pilot I can always tell it right away, even if I haven't seen him. He goes by the print-out, and they might as well hook it up directly to the controls. He gets us there, just like Rusty, but it's not the same. You *feel* the difference.

Rusty just climbed us smoothly up to the Hole, and kicked us through so neatly that unless you were next to a porthole you'd never know we were in space.

It's a sharp transition. The Hole is a quarter-kilometer wide, a big round red-bordered reinforced cutout in the plastic envelope which contains the Moon's atmosphere, and you'd think the air would be rushing out through it into space like a hurricane-force wind. It doesn't. It just lies there, like a zoo-bred animal that knows only the confines of its cage. Sure, a few atoms of various gases are peeling off all the time, drifting out into space and dispersing, but in no mad rush. A lot of Earth-bound tourists on their first trip up just can't understand the physics involved, and I guess it's a good thing I'm not the one who has to try to explain it to them, because the best I can do is this:

The pliofilm envelope which girds the Moon is not "stretched tight" by the pressure of the atmosphere it contains. The opposite: it *floats* on the gas beneath it. It is buoyed *up* by our atmosphere.

So why's it there, then? the tourist asks. Why bother, if it isn't containing any pressure?

Well, that's not the whole story. The weight of the film helps compress the atmosphere some—and gives us a much more even pressure distribution from film to Lunar surface. But mainly the film is there because without it, the Moon's gravity simply wouldn't be enough to retain the atmosphere we spent so much energy in liberating—and we'd lose it all within a few centuries. It not only takes a lot of energy to transmute silicates into component gases—being very careful which gases you allow to escape into the atmosphere and which you must keep and dispose of elsewhere—it also takes a lot of solid material. There are conser-

vationists on the Moon right now who think we've permanently disfigured the planet, even though we were careful to tear up only the landscape facing away from Earth, and our plastic-shrouded atmosphere doesn't show to the naked eye on Earth—not nearly as much as our eventual cultivation of the Mares will.

Anyway, a hole as small as the Navigational Holes in the film is just meaningless when you consider the total area the film covers—the entire surface of the Moon. And that answers the other popular tourist question—how about meteorites? The holes they make are infinitesimal, and unless someone notices one, they're ignored. (Periodically, when the computers have a big enough list of punctures to make it worth our while, we—or another patrol like ours—will take a balloon up and release some Sticky Patches in the area. They tend to drift to the holes and seal them. But I don't like that kind of work. Balloons make me nervous. I feel better in free space.) Frankly, I'm just as glad we have the film, and a nice reasonably thick atmosphere. I haven't heard of any meteorites big enough to survive burning up since I've been living here, and that's been most of my adult life.

I wasn't next to a porthole, but my memory of the times I had been was enough. One minute you're in thick, warm-yellow air, the sky over you a brassy golden glare—and the next you're in the night of space, a hazy flat surface just below, bouncing up a dazzle of sunlight at you if it's that time of day. It can grab you all right—if your mind isn't somewhere else.

I was still thinking about Rose, and what the hell I was going to do, when

Joe elbowed me. I looked up and saw the aft lock was open and waiting, the others already filling it up.

I eased to my feet, one hand automatically going to my helmet and then to the control that switched me over to my own air. Beyond the airlock there would now be only hard vacuum.

We were in freefall, and I used only my toes and fingertips to drift me after Joe and into the lock. As the lock door cycled shut, I adjusted the volume on the radioset behind my right ear—it was too high and somebody's asthmatic breathing was louder in my helmet than my own.

The opposite side of the lock opened automatically, and we moved out into the cargo area of the ferry.

It resembled a hangar—large and nearly empty. Five tugs hugged the side walls for security; Joe and I made for the number four tug.

A tug is just a contraption for getting around in free space: no frills. It looks like something you might put together with a Meekano set, a skeleton framework of lightweight girders with thrusters on all peripheries. There's winches and cables, and, nestled in the middle of it all, two incongruous-looking seats and a computer panel. Completing the picture are two dish-shaped radio antennae, top and bottom, relative to the seats.

We unhooked our tug from its docking area, working in the blueish glare of the interior lights. Then, since we were first to be ready, but fourth out of five, we strapped in and waited.

The rear of the ferry was open now, and blackness yawned beyond. One by one, the first three tugs swung out into the center of the cargo area and then

with a few flashes darted out into free space. We followed them.

As we moved out into open space, I looked up reflexively, past the rotating antenna and—down—at the surface of the Moon.

We were in a high orbit: the Moon was a huge sphere hanging directly over us. My stomach tensed, and my fingers beat Joe's by an instant to the console for the attitude control. We rolled, and then the Moon was where it belonged—below our feet. It's funny what a difference that can make. I didn't realize until I let my breath out that I'd been holding it.

Tug #5 had joined us by then, and Podwill's voice was right behind my ear as he said, "Are we all here, men? Okay, let's do it."

Joe keyed the autocontrol in, and the computers—slaves aboard the tugs, overseer on the ferry, master below—meshed into synchronization. The data was all in the computers: for now we were passengers, just along for the ride.

We moved into formation, five tugs moving as one, and swept out into the starry night. Below, the Moon was a golden ball, a bit muzzy where the film reflected sunlight, Earthlight or starlight, but detailed enough for all of that. Almost directly below was a tiny red "O"—Leytown Hole, our portal into space. Scattered in almost random patterns across the transparent surface of the plicofilm were other red "O"s—a light sprinkling of freckles which marked the other Navigational Holes by which spacetravelers might gain access to our new planetary home. Here and there I could just make out the tiny patches of green that marked our farms, mine among them. When you work down in a low orbit, it's not

impossible to locate your own. Up here the green blended almost imperceptibly with the golden haze of the undeveloped surface—so bleak and gray upon closer examination.

I didn't have long to stare down at the planet I now called home. Braking thrusters flared, and quite suddenly the space around us was filled with the shadowed, half-visible bulks of something once vast.

I'd never seen anything like them. Just off to our portside and below was something that looked like a great chunk of half-ripped and much twisted machinery. The only thing I could think of was one of those old steam locomotives they put on display in certain southwestern towns in Old NorthAm, down on Earth . . . a steam locomotive which someone had picked up and twisted like you twist a washcloth.

Above us, and a little distance away, rust-colored in the sunlight, was something which looked like a fused mass of sprocket-gear wheels. And beyond these were other hulks, all of them large—as large as our ferry, I guessed—and misshapen.

"Jesus H. Christ and all the little Maries," said a hoarse voice in my ear. Mantee—a nominal Catholic, or so he claims. "Where the hell did *this* stuff come from?"

Podwill laughed—much too loud. I thumbed down the volume another notch. "One of these days you boys are going to start listening to your briefing," he said.

"Asteroid belt," Joe's voice said, laconically.

"Right," Podwill said. "Our biggest find yet. So let's hop to it—you guys got your work cut out for you this time!"

*Clichés. What does the man do? Spend all his free time watching old war tapes?* I unstrapped myself, leaving only my life-line attached at my belt.

"Shit, Podwill, you expect us to bring in all these damned things, *one each?*" Lutu's high-pitched voice.

From the asteroid belt: drifting debris of something inexplicable. These weren't the first. Those had been discovered by the fourth Mars mission—or what was left of them, in an impact crater on Mars. More had been discovered since: they had an inward drift, like much of the asteroid belt. But nobody had a smooth explanation for them: we *knew* the asteroid belt had never been a planet, much less a planet with its own civilized inhabitants. This alien debris—call it *junk*—seemed to be scattered through the asteroids, but it wasn't *of* the asteroids. There were a lot of theories—I used to collect the wildest ones when I was a boy—but nobody knew the truth of the matter, and they all made about as much sense. There were no standing artifacts on any moon or planet we had visited, and no signs there had ever been one. Only these drifting scraps—some no bigger than a ping-pong ball, others—

*Bigger than the ferry.*

"Podwill," my voice sounded in my helmet and over my radio simultaneously, "how the hell are we supposed to get these things down?"

"We aren't," he said. "They're going to Earth."

I KICKED OFF and let the slack from the life-line slip through my fingers, tightening my grip to brake my speed when I was only yards above the hulk.

*Big—damned big!*

Too big for a ferry, too big to take

down to the Moon. It made sense: we'd collect this junk before it made its own uninterrupted way down to the lunar surface, just as we collected all such junk, man-made or otherwise, which was drifting into a collision orbit with the Moon. The only thing that made this patrol different from the usual monthly outing was the size and nature of the "junk." This wasn't scrap for the refractories. This stuff, like all the bits and pieces of alien junk, would go to the scientists, for study and analysis and all the rest of that scam—for all the good it would do us. Too big to waste power on, taking it down to a planetary surface: it would be towed into a stable orbit around Earth and parked there. Somebody would establish a lab near it, and that would be that. It turned out it had been on a program for years, now, waiting for somebody to come up with the first really big pieces.

I'd done a partial somersault, and I came down on my feet, letting my legs fold to absorb the impact. I fell to an easy squat, and my hand went down to a pipe or railing or something that ran laterally along the thing. It felt very thick, massive, heavy. Like a part of a one-piece solid casting—that kind of heavy. "Got it," I said. I snapped off my life-line and secured it to the railing or whatever it was. Then I hooked the sliding ring at my belt back onto the life-line, and jumped back to the tug.

That's the way we usually split it up: Joe stayed with the tug and I did the outside work. I'm in better control of my body; Joe's touch on the tug console is lighter and surer.

We used both winches, fore and aft. It wasn't hard to find places to attach the grapples, and the work took me



only seventeen minutes. Then, strapped back in my seat and a passenger again, I let Joe take over.

Joe is very good. He can play the thruster controls like a master pianist. He doesn't use the computer at all; he has this instinctive seat-of-the-pants way of feeling his balances, weights and inertias. And it was tricky. We were dealing with a really heavy mass, a gnat tugging at an elephant. We had just so much fuel, and these little thrusters. The trick was to use judo on the thing. You don't tug against its drift; you just start *diverting* it a little. The onboard computer was keeping track of the other tugs and their maneuvers; it wouldn't let any of us get fouled up. But it was Joe's task to yank here, and then there, working at the thing like a master fisherman playing a 150-pound gamefish with a ten-pound-test line. Subtle.

Every action has its reaction: a man down on Earth, sitting on a dockside mooring line can swing an ocean-going freighter into the pilings just with the weight of his own body—if he keeps sitting there long enough. It took us some time, and number one and number four tugs were way ahead of us, with their smaller, less massive things in tow, but Joe put us into a nice looping figure-eight for Earth in only two hours, eight minutes.

Then it was over—for us. We'd done our bit. All we had to do was unhook and return to the ferry. Somebody Earthside would take over—probably the tugs from old Muskie Station—to stabilize the things in a parking orbit. That would be a few days from now, and not my worry at all.

I unstrapped and went out, hand over hand, to where I'd secured the aft

grapple, and freed it. I cast it loose and watched the heavy cable snake about in the sunlight while Joe reeled it in. Then, feeling a little too cocky, I guess, I went forward on the thing to release the other line.

I stubbed my toe.

That probably sounds idiotic. I was doing a hand-over-hand, pulling myself along the same damned pipe or railing or whatever to which I'd first tied on. It ran the length of the thing and made a natural. I didn't even think about it. The job was already over, as far as I was concerned.

That was my mistake. As long as you're in space, your job isn't over.

Bits and pieces of metal twisted and jutted out from the pitted sides of the thing, some of them close to the pipeline I was following. One was too close. I felt my left foot strike it—just carelessness; I wasn't watching where my feet were, I wasn't snaking my way past the obstacles like I should've been—and it was a numbing blow.

I said something loud and profane, completely forgetting for a moment I was on an open circuit.

"Sam! What happened?" Joe's voice.

"Hey, man?" Wilson, on tug number two.

"Davies, this is a public circuit!" Podwill: his voice overlapped several others.

"Hit my foot," I said, voice subdued.

"Sam," Joe said. "How bad is it?"

"I just banged my foot, fer crissakes," I said, wishing now I'd kept my mouth shut, or failing that, had the presence of mind to shut the damned sending unit off.

"Fuck that," Joe said. "You take a closer look."

I hooked my arm through the rail-

ing-thing and curled my body up into a ball so I could look at my foot.

The sunlight on my white stretch-suit was dazzlingly bright. The blood was purple-black and spilling off into space in little bursting spherical globules. "Oh, sweet Jesus," I breathed.

"I can see the blood from here," Joe said quietly. "How bad is it?"

"Davies!" Podwill again. "What is the extent of your injury?" He couldn't seem to decide between concern and reprimand. Maybe the thought of all the insurance money I was going to collect was bothering him. The other twenty-seven days of the month, Podwill is Leytown's insurance man.

"I can't tell," I said. My foot was still numb—no feeling but this terrible throbbing ache, like I'd hit it with a hammer or something.

"Are you losing—?" Podwill started in.

"Hey, Sam." Lutu. "You need any extra help over there?"

"All unnecessary chatter will cease," Podwill said. "Davies: Report on your condition. Are you losing blood?"

A sudden bright stab of anger pushed me out of shock. "You're god-damned right I'm losing blood, Podwill. So shut the hell up, will you, and let me'n Joe do this thing right!"

There's no such thing as a first-aid kit on a tug—and no way to use one in open space if you had it. Band-aids? Forget it. I saw the other line suddenly spring loose—from the tug. "I'm jet-tisoning the fore cable," Joe said, his voice very calm. "Sam, can you get back over here?"

"Leibner!" Podwill was shouting in my ear. "What did you do?"

"Fuck off," was Joe's only reply.

"I think so," I said, to his earlier

question. He'd brought the tug drifting in closer—a short jump away.

I pushed off and wheeled lazily toward the tug, grabbing a girder and swinging my way down in with my hands. I left a swirling trail of bright dots fluorescing in the sunlight in the space behind me: the crystalline remnants of my blood.

"Looks like you got a vein, Sam," Joe said as I pulled the seat straps around me. "See if you can seal it off with your hand—your blood's boiling out with the pressure differential."

I did. I cramped my fingers over my foot and squeezed down with them, feeling the pressure through the tight sheath of my elastic boot. Blood oozed out around my fingers at first, bubbling and spattering into dry dust in the heat of the sunlight. My head felt very light, almost detached from my body.

"Hurt any?" Joe said, as he started us back to the ferry on a crash-priority course and acceleration.

"No," I said, dreamily, "I can't feel a thing. That's good, isn't it?"

He shook his head. "That's bad," he said.

**T**HEY LET ME OUT of the Leytown Dispensary in three days, with much headshaking and several pitying side-long glances. *Sam Davies—lost his foot up there.* Sheer stupidity: a simple, stupid error, and now I had a plastic foot.

"We were lucky to save your lower leg, Mr. Davies," the doctor had told me. "Our experience with this sort of thing is very rare."

Yeah, lucky my municipal hazard insurance—courtesy Jerome Podwill—covered it. Imagine how it would've

(Continued on page 108)

*A new writer offers a brief and poignant vignette about a rather too-romantic young girl named—*

# MYRRA

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT

MYRRA stepped gingerly along the sidewalk, glorying in the surrounding natural life. The signs of summer were plain here. Fern-leaved jacaranda trees, cropped *brake* underbrush, and delicate maidenhair fronds swayed gently in the afternoon breeze, contrasting peculiarly with the narrow aluminum rail on which she leaned. Grass, cultivated and wild, grew green and fresh; flowers, more than she had ever seen in one place, blossomed in dazzling colors, spreading their delicious scent on the soft air.

The splendor of the park took her breath away. With a glance at her skin dial that bespoke disappointment, she realized that mother and father would be waiting dinner. She would return tomorrow.

On the way home, an urgent impulse seized her. She longed to pick one of the rose blossoms! But park laws were exact on this, and despoiling the natural growths within the park carried a stiff penalty. Myrra sighed. She recalled the fleeting phrase from an Old Lit tape: "Gather ye rosebuds . . ."

Dinner. And after that, guests to be entertained. No chance to humor the whimsy she had of returning to the park, before it closed for the evening. Later, when the visitors had gone, she lay in bed, reconstructing the beauty of the little nature yet preserved; perhaps, in

some other day, she would have been a poet. Now, she was merely a student at the sterile Training Center.

In the morning, as she prepared for class, the thought persisted. *To pluck a rose . . .* It was not obscured by the metallic sameness of the lectures, or by the gradual dissipation of the day. By four o'clock, she had persuaded herself. She had determined her course of action. Picking a blossom entailed a penalty; she would risk it.

Again Myrra trod the walk where she had stood yesterday. Long, she absorbed the harmony and peaceful atmosphere of the park. And, at last, her courage all gathered, she stole a careful look about. No one was watching.

Ducking under the aluminum rail, she stepped onto grass for the first time. A thrill raced through her. In a moment, she had grasped the beckoning rose and parted it from the stem. Myrra raised it to her nostrils, savoring the delicate, sweet scent as her fingers stroked the petal-soft blossom. Then she slipped back under the rail.

But it was too late. The auto-alarm blared menacingly, and in an instant, the park guards were coming up the walk toward her. Frightened, she turned and ran, holding the flower up to her face, where she could see its exquisite beauty and sniff its rich scent.

The guards increased their pace from a trot, and cried out to her. She continued running.

*Gather ye rosebuds . . .*

In haste, eyes on the flower, she stumbled; the rose flew from her hand, and then the park guards were upon her. Myrra only had time for one sob before the four darts tore through her.

She had known the penalty.

*And this same flower that smiles today,*

*Tomorrow will be dying . . .*

The guards turned to call the mortuary, crushing the velvety crimson blossom into the sidewalk as they left.

—David Anthony Kraft

(Continued from page 9)

blue uniform appeared on his right.

"Hold it right there, fella," the guard called in a startled voice, as he clawed for his revolver.

*Good-by, Abe thought smugly. It was nice knowing you.*

He pressed the switch on the metal belt.

Something hit Abe a solid blow on the ribs, knocking him off the course, and he ran straight into a concrete lamp standard. As he fell to the ground, winded, Abe realized he had made the transfer to alpha time successfully but had collided with a man already there. Both men were lying a helpless, gasping heap outside the bank.

"You stupid. . ." Abe's voice faded away as he saw that the man he had bumped into was wearing a blue roll-neck sweater with the collar pulled up over his face, and was holding a plastic Luger in one hand and a duffle bag in the other. He had run into himself!

"You stupid. . ." The other Abe's voice faded away, too, and his eyes widened as they peered over the rim of his woollen collar.

"Hold it right there, you two," the guard called in a startled voice from further along the avenue, as he clawed for his revolver.

Abe reached for the switch on his buckle, but the belt had ceased vibrat-

ing and a wisp of acrid smoke was curling up from it. In any case, he remembered morosely, there was a guard with a drawn gun looking for him in the timestream he had just left.

**"B**UT WHERE did you come from?" the other Abe demanded angrily, through the bars of his adjoining cell. "Why did you have to show up and spoil things after I spent weeks casing that bank?"

"That's the trouble," Abe told him. "The professor tried to warn me that my other self might be doing the same thing as I was. Our two world-lines weren't sufficiently divergent for me to capitalize on the . . . whaddayacallit." He returned his gaze to the newspaper which had been passed in to him by a friendly cop. The headlines read:

**BANK ROBBERY ATTEMPT BY IDENTICAL TWINS**

*'Recovered Money Twice As Much As Was Stolen', Says Baffled Bank Official.*

"I still don't get it," the other Abe grumbled.

"It's all to do with the Doctrine of Infinite Redundancy," Abe replied. "Too deep for a crumb like you."

He turned his face to the wall and tried to go to sleep.

—Bob Shaw

*Within his body two identities fought for control—his own and that of a man who no longer existed—!*

# THE SECOND TRIP

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## ROBERT SILVERBERG

Illustrated by MICHAEL WM. KALUTA  
(Second of Two Parts)

### SYNOPSIS

I am Paul Macy. *That's the way they programmed him. But only a few years earlier he had been Nat Hamlin, a famous sculptor, and he had been apprehended for a series of psychotic episodes in which he had assaulted and raped several women.*

*They'd found new and better ways of dealing with people like Nat Hamlin in the early 21st Century: they called it Rehab. They burned out and destroyed Hamlin's personality and programmed a new personality, with new memories—ersatz, of course, but subjectively real—to go in his place, to command his body. And they called him Paul Macy.*

*It was an infallible technique. Dr. Gomez assured him of that. He was Paul Macy for now and for evermore.*

*So why did it all start falling to pieces on his first day out, walking up the street in Manhattan North, on his way to his new job? Why did he have to bump into a girl who ignored his Rehab badge, whose first words were, "Nat—Nat Hamlin, for God's sake!"*

*It was a chance you took, running into someone from your—Nat Hamlin's—former life. But she wasn't playing by the rules. The rules said she should glance at the Rehab badge and then treat him like the total stranger he indeed was.*

*Instead, he felt this excruciating pain, like a long cold needle slipping into his eye, cutting through his brain, and the girl—Lissa Moore—kept calling him Nat, wanting him to remember her.*

*She was tall and slender, with long straight red hair, troubled green eyes, fine features. A light dusting of freckles on the bridge of her nose. Full lips. No makeup. She wore a scruffy blue checked spring coat and she looked as if she hadn't been sleeping well lately. She looked like she was in her late twenties: very pale; attractive in a tired, frayed way. She said, "Don't play around with me. I know you're Nat Hamlin."*

*She was in trouble, that was obvious. She was trouble. She'd been his mistress, she said, five years ago. She'd loved him. She still loved him. She couldn't accept the Rehab thing. She couldn't take him*

as Paul Macy. She wanted—she needed—Nat Hamlin. To her he was Nat Hamlin.

She was insistent. She grabbed his wrist and he felt a baffling sensation in the top of his skull and for a moment he was no longer just Paul Macy. He felt a doubling of self, and in the core of his mind was a vivid scene in garish colors: he was crouched over a keyboard, and Lissa was standing naked on the fur side of a cluttered room, hands pressed to cheeks. *Scream, he was saying. Go on, Lissa, scream. Give us a good one. Then it faded. He was back on the street, but he couldn't see properly—everything was still out of focus and getting worse. His legs couldn't hold him. It felt like a heart attack.*

Finally she seemed to understand. She was wrecking his conditioning. She backed off and things eased. He clung to the side of a building and watched her slowly walk away.

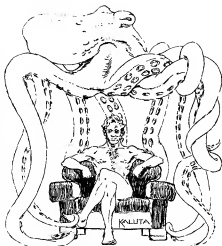
They said a former personality couldn't come back. They said Rehab was 100% successful. They were wrong.

Nat Hamlin was there, lurking in the recesses of his mind, each and every time he encountered a reminder of the man. When he got to the network offices where his new job awaited him, a Hamlin psychosculpture in an office almost felled him. Hamlin had been good—too good. There were tangible reminders of him everywhere.

He went back to Dr. Gomez: "What gives you the idea Hamlin still exists?"

"During these nightmares," Macy said, "I feel him pushing inside my head. Like somebody trying to get out."

"Hamlin exists only as an abstract concept," Gomez assured him. "He's a famous psychosculptor who ran into trouble with the law and was eradicated.



Now he exists only through his works. Like Mozart. Like Michelangelo. He isn't in your head."

But he was.

And the girl, Lissa Moore, knew it. She kept trying to see him. Finally he arranged a meeting with her. They went to a people's restaurant. Lissa was in bad shape. Gaunt, starving. Wrists dirty, fingernails ragged. But not just outwardly unkempt; she conveyed a sense of inner disintegration that terrified him.

"I'm going out of my mind," she told him. "I hear voices. Other people's minds come into mine. And mine goes into theirs."

ESP. Telepathy. "I didn't think that really existed."

"You bet your ass," she said with a bitter laugh. "Sitting right here in front of you. The genuine article."

She couldn't "read minds"—not in the cliché sense. Just touch, mind to mind. Things drifted in, drifted out. Voices humming in her brain, a word, a phrase, an image. Since she was ten or twelve years old. But much worse now. The past two years had been hell. "Absolute hell.

*I don't know who I am any more a lot of the time. I get to be five, six people at once. This mushy noise in my head. The buzzing. The voices. Like static, only sometimes words drift in on the static. I pick up all these weird emotions. . . ."*

*She needed him. But not him—not Paul Macy. She needed Nat.*

*And she got him. Somehow a part of her mind reached out and touched a vestige, a spark of the old Nat Hamlin still living somewhere inside his mind—touched it and restimulated it and gave it shape and purpose. Not consciously, but to the same effect. It had begun with their first chance meeting on the street, germinating in his dreams, his nightmares, his encounters with Hamlin's past, each of which restimulated it. And now, in the restaurant, as he rose from the table, refusing her plea to help her, knowing she would only suck him down with her, he heard her scream, "No! Come back! Paul! Paul! Paul! Nat!"*

*It knocked him down and he felt himself splitting into two distinct persons, the other person saying to him from a point just above his left ear:*

*—How could you walk out on her like that, you snotty creep?*

*Who said that? he asked, going under.*

*—I did. Nat Hamlin. Your twin brother Nat.*

*Nat Hamlin wasn't eradicated. He wasn't gone. He was there, inside Paul Macy's head, wishing Macy gone, wanting to regain control of his body, working, scheming to take over.*

*Paul found himself bound up in Lissa, and Lissa in the two of them. She moved in with him, contrite at having stimulated Nat's return, fearful at the same time of Nat, a still-psycho-*

*pathic personality locked inside the decent mind of Paul Macy.*

*It was a duel. Paul Macy—synthetic, but to himself and increasingly to Lissa a real and complete human being—versus Nat Hamlin, artistic genius, human failure.*

*They jockeyed. And in each encounter Hamlin seemed to grow, like a psychological cancer, lurking in the dark alleyways of Macy's mind, waiting for a moment when he might strike, might regain control of his body.*

## NINE

**L**ISSA WASN'T THERE. He looked through the apartment with great care, methodically passing several times from one room to the other and quickly doubling back, as though she might be slipping invisibly through the door just ahead of him; but no, she wasn't anywhere around. He checked the bathroom and the closets. Her things were still hanging helter-skelter among his. Not gone permanently, then. A note from her? No, nothing. Might have gone out to take a walk. Or to buy some groceries for dinner. At this hour, though? Knowing he always came home punctually? Briefly alarmed, he searched the place once again, looking now for traces of violence. No. A mystery, then. She had her own key, and he had reprogrammed the thumbplate safety latch to accept her fingerprint; she could come and go as she pleased. But she should have been on hand when he arrived. He couldn't understand why she wasn't. What now? Notify the police? There was this girl, officer, she's been living with me since Tuesday night, she wasn't home when I returned

from work, I wonder if you. No. Hardly. Ask the neighbors if they had seen her? No. Go out and look for her in the local shops? No. Search for her at her own apartment? Maybe. Do nothing, stay here, wait for her to show up? Maybe. For the time being, yes. Give her an hour, two hours. She has her moods. Maybe she went to a show. Feeling tense, just went off by herself. Odd that there's no note, anyway.

He showered, put on his worn dressing-gown, poured himself a little cream sherry to blunt the edge of his appetite. Getting later all the time. Half past six, no Lissa. Worry mounting in him. They had not, in the course of constructing him at the Rehab Center, prepared him to handle this sort of situation. He reviewed the possible options. Police. Local shops. Her apartment. Neighbors. Sit and wait. No tactic seemed adequate.

Out of the silence, the voice of the serpent:

—Don't worry about her.

Right now, in his jangled state, even the presence of Hamlin was a comfort. His other self had spoken in a casual, easy way; no challenge, at the moment, merely conversation. Macy was grateful for the muted approach. He wondered how to be properly hospitable. Offer Hamlin some sherry? A gold? Sit down, Nat, make yourself at home. An impulse of lunatic sociability.

*I can't help worrying, Macy said.*

—She can look after herself.

*Can she, though?*

—I know her better than you.

*You haven't had anything to do with her for almost five years. She's unstable, Hamlin. I don't like the idea of her wandering off by herself this way.*

—She probably felt she needed some

fresh air. Bad telepathic vibrations bouncing off the walls in here, isn't that what she told you? Getting her down. So she went out.

*Without leaving a note?*

—Lissa doesn't leave notes much. Lissa's not awfully big on responsibility. Relax, Macy.

*That's easy enough to say.*

—You know, maybe she walked out for good. Sick of us both, maybe. All the tension and brawling.

*Her things are still here, though,* Macy pointed out. Grasping at straws. Lissa! Lissa!

—That wouldn't matter to her. Abandoned possessions fall from her like dandruff. Hey, cheer up, will you? The worst that can happen is that you won't ever see her again. Which maybe would be not such a terrible thing.

*You'd like it a lot, wouldn't you?*

—What's it to me?

*You don't want me to have anything to do with her. You're jealous because I'm alive and you're not. Because I have her and you don't.*

Robust interior chuckles bubbling in the brain. Derisive guffaws echoing through the involuted corridors.

—You're such a prick, Macy.

*Can you deny what I said?*

—What you said had more nonsense per square inch than is allowed under present brain-pollution laws.

*For example?*

—Where you say you "have" Lissa. Nobody "has" Lissa, ever. Lissa floats. Lissa drifts in a private orbit. Lissa lives inside a sealed airtight glass cage. She doesn't involve herself with other people. She spends time with them, yes, she talks with them, she fucks them sometimes, but she doesn't surrender anything that's real to her.



*She involved herself with you.*

—That was different. She loved me. The great exception in her life. But she doesn't love you or anybody else, herself included. You're fooling yourself if you think you mean anything to her.

*How can you claim to know so much about her when you haven't seen her in five years?*

—I've had all this week to watch her too, haven't I? That girl is very sick. This ESP thing is pulling her apart. She thinks she has to be alone in order to keep the voices out of her head. She can't give herself to anybody for long; she has to retreat, pull back, sink into herself. Otherwise she hurts too much. So you mustn't be surprised that she's walked out. It was inevitable. Believe me, Macy, I'm telling the truth.

A strange note of sincerity in Hamlin's tone. As if he's trying to protect me from a troublesome entanglement, Macy thought. As if he's got my welfare at heart. Curious.

Seven o'clock, now. No Lissa. Another sherry. Feet up on the hassock. Feeling almost relaxed, despite everything. Hardly even hungry. A slight headache. Where is she? She can look after herself. She can look after herself.

—Have you done any further thinking about the proposal I made?

*What proposal?*

—On Tuesday, in the museum. That you go away and let me have my body back.

*You know the answer to that one.*

—You're being unreasonable, Macy. I mean, look at it objectively. You may think you exist, but you actually don't. You're a construct. You don't have any more genuine reality as a person, as a human being, than that wall over

there.

*So you keep telling me. If I don't exist, though, why do I worry about Lissa? Why do I enjoy sipping this sherry? Why do I work so hard at the network?*

—Because you've been programmed to. Crap, Macy, can't you see that you're only a clever machine that's been slipped into a vacant human body? Which turned out to be not quite vacant, which still had some bits of its former owner hiding in it. If you were capable of facing your own situation decently and honestly, you'd recognize that—

*Right, Macy cut in. I'd recognize that I'm a nothing and you're a genius, and I'd get the hell out of your head.*

—Yes.

*Sorry, Hamlin. You're wasting our time asking me to. Why should I commit suicide just to give you a second chance to mess up your life?*

—Suicide! Suicide! You've got to be alive before you can commit suicide!

*I'm alive.*

—Only in the most narrow technical sense.

*Fuck you, Hamlin.*

—Let's try to keep the conversation on a friendly basis, okay?

*How can I be friendly when you invite me to kill myself? Where's the advantage for me in accepting your deal? What do you have to offer that makes it worth my while to give you this body back?*

—Nothing. I can only appeal to your sense of equity. I'm more talented than you. I'm more valuable to society. I deserve to live more than you do.

*I'm not so sure of that. Society's verdict was that you had no value at all, in fact that you were dangerous and had*

*to be destroyed. Not even rehabilitated, in the old pre-Rehab sense of the word. Destroyed.*

—A miscarriage of justice. I could have been salvaged. I went insane, I don't deny it, I did a lot of harm to a bunch of innocent women. But that's all over. If I came back now, I'd be beyond all that crap. I'd keep to myself and practice my art.

*Sure you would. Sure. Look, Hamlin, if you want this body back, take it away from me—if you can. But I'm not giving it to you just for the asking. I don't think as little of myself as you do. Forget it.*

—I wish I could make you see my point of view.

Half past seven. Still no Lissa. Macy switched from sherry to bourbon. Also lit the first gold of the evening. A deep drag; instant response, lightheadness, a loss of contact with his feet. Just a touch of pot-paranoia, too: suppose Hamlin made a grab for his brain while he was fuddled with liquor and fumes? Could he fight back properly? His skullmate had been quiet for ten or fifteen minutes now. Gathering strength for an assault, maybe. Keep your guard up.

But no assault came. The intoxicants that lulled Macy seemed to lull Hamlin as well.

Eight o'clock.

*Hamlin? You still there?*

—You rang, milord?

*Talk to me.*

—Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation conceived in liberty and—

*No, be serious. Tell me something. What's it like for you, inside there?*

—Crowded and nasty.

*How do you visualize yourself?*

—As an octopus. A very small octopus, Macy, maybe a millionth of an inch in diameter, sitting smack in the middle of the left side of your head. With long skinny tentacles reaching out to various parts of your brain.

*Can you see the outside world?*

—When I want to. It uses some energy, but it isn't really hard. I hook into your optic input, is all, and then I see whatever you're seeing.

*What about hearing?*

—A different kind of hookup. I keep that one patched in nearly all the time.

*Sense of touch? Smell? Taste?*

—The same. It's no great trick to cut into your sensory receptors and find out what's going on outside.

*What about reading my thoughts?*

—Easy. A tentacle into the cerebral cortex. I monitor you constantly there, Macy. You think it, I pick it up instantly. And I can sort out your consciously directed mental impulses from the mush of mental noise that you put out steadily, too.

*How did you learn these things?*

—Trial and error. I woke up, see, not knowing where I was, what had happened to me. Lissa gave me a telepathic nudge, not even realizing she was doing it, and there I was. Locked in a dark room, a coffin, for all I knew. So I started groping around in your head. Accidentally touched something and made a connection. Hey, I can see! Touched something else. I can hear! What's this? Somebody else is wearing my body! But if I make contact here, I can pick up his thoughts. And so on. It took a few days.

*And you keep learning things all the time, eh, Hamlin?*

—Frankly, I haven't been making

much progress lately. I'm finding it hard to override your conscious control, your motor centers, your speech center. To make you walk where I want you to walk, to make you say what I want you to say. I can do a little of that, but it costs me a terrific load of energy, and sooner or later you pull me loose. Maybe there's a secret to overriding you that I haven't found yet.

*You manage to mess with my heartbeat pretty easily, though.*

—Oh, yes. I've got decent control over most of your autonomic system. I could turn your heart off in five seconds. But what's the use? You die, I'd die too. I could play with your digestive juices and give you an ulcer by morning. Only this is my body as much as yours: I don't gain anything by damaging it.

*Nevertheless you can cause me plenty of pain.*

—Indeed I can. I could harass you most miserably, Macy. How would you like the sensation of a toothache, twenty-five hours a day? Not the toothache itself, nothing a dentist could fix, just the sensation of it. How would you like a premature ejaculation, every time? How would you like a feedback loop in your auditory system so that you heard everything twice with a half-second delay? I could make your life hell. But I'm not really a sadist. I don't have any hard feelings toward you. I simply want my body back. I still hope we can work things out in an amiable way, without the need for me to apply real pressure.

*Let's not start that routine again. Macy reached for the bourbon. I want to know more about you. What it's like for you in there. Can you actually see the interior of my brain?*

—See it? The neurons, the synapses, the brain cells? Not really. Only in a metaphorical sense. A visionary sense. I can set up one-to-one percept equivalents, such as my perception of myself as a miniature octopus, do you follow? But I don't actually see. It's hard to explain. I'm aware of things, structures, forms, but I simply can't communicate that awareness to someone who hasn't ever been on the inside himself. You have to remember that I don't have an organic existence. I'm not a lump of something solid under your headbone, a kind of tumor. I'm just a web of electrochemical impulses, Macy, and I perceive things differently.

*But aren't we all just webs of electrochemical impulses? What am I if not that?*

—True. Except that you're linked with this brain at so many points that you don't have any sense of yourself as something distinct from the bodily organ through which you perceive things. I do. I'm dissociated, disembodied. I sense my own existence as something quite separate from the existence of this brain, here, through which I get various sensory inputs when I ask for them, and through which I can force an output by working at it. It's weird, Macy, and it's lousy, and I don't like it at all. But I can't achieve a real hookup, because you're in the way in so many places, entrenched too deeply for me to dislodge you.

*What are we going to do, then?*

—Continue annoying each other, I suppose.

Quarter to nine. Really ought to check up on Lissa somehow, go down to her apartment, ask the cops to investigate. Not very ambitious right

now, though. Maybe she'll come in soon. A long long walk on a spring night, home after dark.

—You're in love with her, aren't you, Macy?

*I don't think so. A certain physical attraction, I don't deny that. And a kind of solidarity of the crippled—she's got troubles, I've got troubles, we really ought to stick together, that kind of feeling. But not love. I don't know her that well. I don't even know myself that well. I have no illusions about that: I'm inexperienced, I'm emotionally immature, I'm brand new in the world.*

—And you're in love with her.

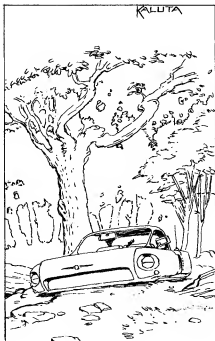
*Define your terms.*

—Don't hand me that sophomoric manure. You know what I mean. Let me tell you a few things about your Lissa, though, that somebody who is as you rightly say emotionally immature might not have noticed.

*Go ahead.*

—She's completely selfish. She exists only for the benefit of Lissa Moore. A bitch, a witch, a cunt that walks, a life-force eater. She'll try to suck the vitality out of you. She tried it with me, hoping she could drain some of my talent out of me and into her. I was fighting her all the way. I held her off pretty well. Although I think that ESP of hers infected me somehow and caused my breakdown. I didn't realize that at the time it was happening, Macy, but it occurred to me later, that she was fastening onto me, messing up my mind, robbing me of strength, pushing me over some sort of brink. And after a year or so I fell in. She won't need as long with you. She'll bleed you dry in a month.

*You make her sound like a monster. She strikes me as being an awfully pa-*



*thetic monster, Hamlin.*

—That's because you've come to know her only when she's in trouble. This ESP of hers, do you think it was an accident? Something that just sprouted in her, like the measles? It's that hunger of hers. To use people, to devour people, to drain people, to engulf people. Which finally got out of hand, which ran away with her. Now she drains automatically, she pulls in impulses from all sides, more than her mind can stand, and it's killing her. It's burning her out. But she asked for it.

*How harsh you are.*

—Just realistic. I never knew a woman who wasn't some kind of vampire, and Lissa's the most dangerous

one I knew. A cunt is a cunt. A little bundle of ambitions. I fell for it, for a while. And it ruined me, Macy, it used me up.

*I think your whole outlook on women is distorted.*

—Maybe yes, maybe no. But at least I came by it honestly. Through living. Through experiencing. Through drawing my own conclusions. I didn't pick up my ideas vicariously. I didn't have them pumped into me at a Rehab Center.

*Granted. Which still doesn't make your ideas righter than mine.*

—Whatever you say. I just wanted to warn you about her.

*I'm amazed at the difference in our images of her. You see her as a marauder, a vampire, a drinker of souls. My impression is just the opposite: that she's a weak, passive, dependent girl, terrified by the world. How can they be reconciled?*

—They don't need to be. Why shouldn't my image of her be different from yours? I'm different from you. We're two very different persons.

*And if an outsider tried to make an assessment of Lissa based on what we told him?*

—He'd have to make parallax adjustments to compensate for our differences in perspective.

*But which is the real Lissa? Yours or mine?*

—Both. She can be passive and weak and still be a monster and a vampire.

*You really believe, though, that she deliberately sets out to drain vitality from people?*

Not necessarily deliberately, Macy. She may not even realize what she's doing. I'm sure she didn't realize it until her inputs got too intense to cope with. It was just a thing she had, a

telepathic thing, a need, a hunger. Which had the incidental effect of destroying people who came close to her.

*I don't feel that she's been destroying me.*

—You're welcome to her, pal.

Twenty minutes to ten. Another shot of bourbon. Smo-o-oth. Another Aca-pulco special, long and luscious, in the all-new, improved, negative-ion-filter format. The good haziness happening now. Perhaps Lissa's dismembered body has by this time been scattered throughout the six boroughs of the city. She seems remote and unreal to him. For the past ten minutes he has allowed himself to indulge in a mood of intense nostalgia. A curious species of nostalgia for the life he did not live. Meditating on the fragments of Hamlin's experience that have bled through to him across the boundaries that separate their identities. And yearning for more.

*Hamlin?*

—Yes.

*How hard would it be to merge our memory files entirely?*

—I don't follow you. What do you mean?

*So that I'd have access to everything you can remember. And you'd have access to all that had happened to me.*

—I imagine it wouldn't be hard.

*I'm willing if you are.*

—It would amount to a merging of identities, you realize. We wouldn't be sure where one of us ends and the other begins. We'd blend, after a while. Frankly, I'd wipe you out.

*You think so?*

—A pretty good chance of it.

*What makes you so sure?*

—Because I'd bring to the blending 35 years of genuine experience. Your 35 years of synthetic memories would

overlay that like a film of dirt, and after a time I'd polish it away, leaving my real life blended to your four years in the Rehab Center, with some interplays from your ersatz existence coloring my recollections of the things I actually did. What would emerge would be a Nat Hamlin somewhat polluted by Paul Macy. Is that what you want? I'm willing if you are, Macy.

*I didn't mean such a complete joining. Just an exchange of memory banks.*

—I already have as much access to what the Rehab Center gave you as I need.

*But I don't have any access to your past, except some stuff that came floating through the barrier while I was asleep. And I want more.*

—What for?

*Because I'm starting to recognize it as my own identity. Because I feel cut off from myself. I want to know what this body did, where it traveled, what it ate, who it slept with, what it was like to be a psychosculptor. The need's been growing in me for a couple of hours now. Or maybe longer. It frustrates me to know that I was somebody important, somebody vital, and that I'm completely cut off from his life.*

—But you weren't anybody important, Macy. I was. You weren't anybody at all. A Rehab doctor's wet dream.

*Don't rub it in.*

—You admit it?

*I never denied I was only a construct, Hamlin.*

—Then why don't you just step aside and let me have the body, then?

*I keep telling you. My past may be a fake, but my present is real as hell, and I'm not giving it up.*

—So you want to add my past to yours, to give you that extra little di-

mension of reality. You want to go on being Paul Macy, but you want to be able to think you used to be Nat Hamlin, too?

*Something like that.*

—Up yours, Macy. My memories are my own property. They're all I've got. Why should I let you muck around in them? Why should I sweat to make you feel realer?

Ten-fifteen. How quiet it is at this time of night. Somehow went without dinner and never even noticed. Sleepy. Sleepy. Phone the police? Tomorrow, maybe. She must have gone back to her own place, I guess. Mmmm. Mmmmm.

—I have a new proposition for you. Eh? Huh?

—Wake up, Macy.

*What's the matter?*

—I want to talk to you. You've been dozing.

*Okay. So talk. I'm listening.*

—Let's make a deal. Let's share the body on an alternating basis. First you run it, then me, then you again, then me again, and so on indefinitely. Operating it under the Paul Macy identity, naturally, so we don't get into legal difficulties.

*You mean we switch every day? Monday Wednesday Friday it's me in charge, Tuesday Thursday Saturday it's you, Sunday we hold dialogs?*

—Not exactly like that. You need the body four days a week to do your job, right? Those four days it's yours. Saturdays and Sundays and holidays are mine. Weekday evenings we divide in such a way that you get some, I get some. We can work out ad-hoc arrangements for swapping time back and forth as the occasion demands.

*I don't see why I have to give you any time at all, Hamlin. The court awarded your body to me.*

—But I'm still in it. And I'm prepared to be a mammoth pain in the ass unless I'm allowed to take charge some of the time.

*You want me to yield half my lifespan to you under duress.*

—I want you to be sensible and cooperative, that's all. Can you function freely with me playing games inside your nervous system? Do you enjoy being harassed? I can cripple your life, Macy. And what about me? Must I be condemned to be bottled up without any autonomy, with my gifts? Listen, even if you run the body for half the time, that's three and a half days a week more than fate originally intended. By rights you shouldn't be here at all. So why not accept a reasonable compromise? Half the time you'll be you, and you can do any fucking thing you please. The other half you'll surrender autonomy and ride as a passenger while I go about my business. Sculpting, screwing, eating, whatever I feel like doing. We'll both benefit. I'll get to live again, a little, and you'll be free from the annoyance of having me constantly interfering with you.

*Well—*

—Another incentive. I'll give you the free run of my memory bank. What you were asking for a little while ago. You can find out who you really were, before you became you.

*Get thee behind me, Satan!*

—Will you tell me what's wrong with the goddam deal?

*Nothing wrong with it. It's too damned tempting, that's what.*

—Then why not go along with it?

A taut uneasy moment. Considering weighing, mulling. Blinking his eyes a

lot. Aware that his head is really too foggy now for such perilous negotiations. Why surrender a chunk of his life to a condemned criminal? Wouldn't it be better to fight it out, to try to expel Hamlin altogether, to break his grip once and for all? Maybe I can't. Maybe when the showdown comes he'll expel me. Perhaps it makes more sense to accept the half-and-half. But even so—a flood of suspicions, suddenly—

*How would we work this switch?*

—Easy. I'd penetrate the limbic system. You know what that is? Down underneath, in the depths of the folds. Controls your pituitary, your olfactory system, a lot of other things, blood pressure, digestion, and so forth. Also the seat of the self, so far as I can tell. You have it pretty well guarded, whether you know it or not. A wall of electrical charge sealing it off. But I could come in by way of the thalamus, reverse the charge—if we cooperate, it would be just a matter of a few seconds and we'd have our shift of identity polarity—I've worked out the mechanisms, I know where the levers are—

*All right. Let's say I cooperate and you take over. What assurance do I have that you'd let me back on top again when your time was up?*

—Why, if I didn't, you could pull all the stuff I've been pulling on you! The situations would be entirely reversed. You could mess around with my heart, my sex life—you'd learn the right link-ups fast, Macy, you aren't dumb—

*I'm not convinced what you say is true. Maybe you'd have a natural advantage, because it was your body originally. Maybe when you were in charge again you could evict me altogether.*

—What an untrusting bastard you

are.

*My life's at stake.*

—All I can say is you've got to have more faith in my good intentions.

*How can I?*

—Look, I'll open wide to you for a minute. I'll give you a complete unshielded entry into my personality. Poke around in there, make your own evaluation of my intentions—you'll see them right up front—decide for yourself whether you can trust me. Okay?

*Go ahead. But no funny stuff.*

—I'm baring my soul to him, and he's still suspicious as hell.

*Go ahead, I said. How do we work this?*

—First, we make some little electrical adjustments in the corpus callosum—

Odd sensations along the back of the neck. Prickling, tingling, a mild stiffening of the skin. Not entirely unpleasant; a certain agreeable feel to it, in fact. Unseen fingers stroking the lobes of his brain, caressing the prominences and corrugations. A tickling on the underside of the skull. Moss beginning to sprout between the white jagged cranial ridges and the soft cerebral folds below. And the oozing of warm fluids. Pulse. Pulse. A wonderful sleepy feeling. Passivity, yes, how splendid a thing is passivity. We are merging. We are opening the gates. How could one have thought that this admirable human being meant to do one harm? When now his soul is thuswise displayed. Its peaks and valleys. Its exaltations and depressions. Its hungers and fears. See, see, I am as human as thou! And I yearn. And I lament. Come let me enfold you. Come. Put aside these unworthy untrustingnesses. Open. Open. Open. Bathed in the warm river. Lulled on

the gentle tide. Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock. This is how we come together. The avoidance of all friction. The total lubrication of the universe. And we dissolve into one another. And we dissolve.

What's that sound?

Buzz-saw at work in the forest! Dentist's drill raping a bicuspid! Jackhammers unpeeling the street! Braked wheels squealing! The fury of clawed cats!

Key turning in the lock!

Lissa! Lissa! Lissa!

Standing on the threshold. Fingertips pressed to lips in alarm. Body curved backward, recoiling in shock. Then the scream. And then:

"Leave him alone! Get your filthy hands off him, Nat!"

Followed by a sudden instinctive bombardment of mental force, a single massive jolt out of her that sent Macy crumpling stunned to the floor. Black-out. Internal churning. Clicking of defective gears. Slow return to semiconsciousness. Lissa embracing him, cradling his throbbing head. A coppery taste in his throat. Incredible lancing pain between the eyes. Her face, smudged, strained, close to his. Her faint worried smile. And Hamlin nowhere within reach. There was in Macy's head that strange blessed aloneness that he had experienced so few times since the first awakening of his other self. Alone. Alone. How quiet it is in here.

TEN

"PAUL? CAN YOU hear me?"

"From a million miles away."

"Are you all right?"

"Dazed. Groggy. Jesus, groggy!"

Trying to sit up. She tugging him back



into his chair. Surprising how strong she is. He looked at his hands. Quivering and twitching. As if a powerful electrical current had passed through his body and was still recycling itself through the peripheral circuits, touching off a muscular spasm here and here and here.

Searching for Hamlin. No, not in evidence. Not at the moment.

"What happened?" he said.

"I was at the door," said Lissa. "And from outside, I could feel the waves coming from his mind and yours. Mostly from his. You were—asleep, drugged, drunk, I don't know. Passive, anyway. And he was taking you over, Paul. His mind was wrapped around yours, and he was turning you off switch by switch—that's the only way I can describe it—and you were about half gone already. Submerged, dismantled, switched off, whatever word is best. I don't know."

"We made a deal. We were going to share the body, half the time him running the show, and me the rest of the time. He promised me that if I let him take over, he'd turn the body back to me when it was my time to have control."

"He was tricking you," she said. "What were you, drunk? Stoned?"

"Both."

"Both. It figures. He was just getting you to lower your defenses so that he could get full control. I felt the whole thing from outside. I opened the door. It was much stronger in here. You sitting there with an idiot smile on your face. Eyes open, but you couldn't see. Hamlin swarming all over you. So I—I don't know, I didn't stop to think, I just *hit* him. With my mind."

"I think you killed him," Macy said.

"No. I hurt him, but I didn't kill

him."

"I can't feel him any more."

"I can," she said. "He's very weak, but I can sense him down at the bottom of your brain. It's like he fell off a twenty-five-foot wall. I don't know how I did it. I just lashed out."

"Like you did that time in the restaurant."

"I suppose," she said. "Why did you let him do that to you?"

Macy shrugged. "We were talking to each other all evening. While I waited for you to come home. Getting chummy with him. We were proposing deals to each other, compromises, arrangements. And then. This talk of sharing came up. I was pretty stoned by then, I suppose. Lucky thing you came in." He glanced up at her and said, after a moment, "Where the hell were you, anyway?"

Out, she told him. She just decided to go out, around five o'clock. Back to her apartment to pick up some of her things. He gave her a fishy look. Even in his present shellshocked condition he was able to see that she had come in emptyhanded. He taxed her with the inconsistency, and she made a stacy attempt to seem innocent, with much shrugging and tossing of the head, telling him that when she had reached her place she had decided she didn't need those things after all, and had left them there. And the rest of the evening? From six o'clock till now? Chatting with old friends down at the house, she said. Sure, he thought, remembering the sort of neighbors she had had there, the slummies, the bandits. Without in so many words accusing her of lying to him, he accused her of lying to him. She was indignant and then at once contrite. Admitting everything. Left here without intending to

come back. The strain, too much strain, too much mental noise, the yammering of the double soul within the single brain getting to be more than she can handle. All night long, lying next to him, picking up the blurred shapeless echoes of the conflict going on within his head. You maybe don't even realize it yourself, she told him. How Hamlin hammers all the time, let me out, let me out, let me out. Deep down below the levels of consciousness. That constant agonized cry. And you fighting back, Paul. Suppressing him, squashing him. Don't you know it's going on? And he shook his head, no, no, I'm only aware when he surfaces and starts talking to me, or when he grabs parts of my nervous system. Tell me more about this. And Lissa told him more. Conveying to him, in short nervous blurts of half-sentences, how much she was suffering from her mere proximity to him, how much it had cost her in extrasensory anguish since she had moved in. It would be bad enough if there was only one of him, but the double identity, no, too much, too fucking much, all that telepathic pressure, her head was splitting. And it got worse every day. Cumulative. Rebirth of the old overpowering impulse to hide herself away from the whole human race. Not your fault, Paul, I know, not your fault, I asked you to take pity on me and help me, but yet, but yet, this is what happens. Even when you aren't here I feel you and Hamlin hemming me in. Pushing against my temples. Like a kind of air pollution, it was: he gathered that she felt the sweaty residue of their grappling selves enfogging and enfouling the place, greasy molecules of disembodied consciousness drifting in the rooms, sucked into her lungs with every

breath. A daily poisoning. So at last she simply had to get out and clear her head. Setting out at five, a long twilight walk downtown, hour after hour, mechanically moving along, lift foot put foot down lift other foot. Finally reaching the vicinity of West 116th Street by nightfall. A somber prowling in darkness through the ruins of the old university. He stared at her in alarm. You really went there? Those charred shells of buildings were, they said, a rapist's heaven, a mugger's paradise. Suicidal to stroll there alone after dark. And she gave him an odd masked look, faintly guilty. What had she done this evening? His imagination supplied a possible answer—or was Hamlin planting the thought, or had it come from her, bleeding across the line of mental contact? A dimly perceived figure, say, pursuing her through the shattered campus. But Lissa crazily unafraid, perhaps half eager to court death or mutilation, defiant, turning to the unknown pursuer, winking, pulling up her tunic, waggling her hips. Here, man, bang away, what do I care? Thrust and thrust and thrust on a bed of rubble. Afterward the man giving her a funny look. You must be real weird, lady. And running away from her, leaving her to proceed on her solitary wandering way. Had it happened? Her clothes weren't rumpled or stained or soiled. Macy told himself that it was all his own ugly fantasy; she had merely been out for a walk, hadn't spread her legs for a stranger, hadn't purged her head of echoes by inviting rape. Go on, he told her. You walked through the ruins. And then? I did a lot of thinking, she said. Wondering if I ought to head back to my old place and stay there. Or go uptown to you. Maybe even to kill myself. The

easiest way. Misery no matter what I do, you see, that's no joke. And finally, beginning to tire, to regret her long nocturnal expedition, beginning to worry about worrying him by her disappearance. Getting on the tube, returning. Standing outside the door and becoming aware of the tricky takeover in progress within. The entry. The last-minute rescue. Tarantara!

"Why did you come back here?" he asked.

A shrug. Vague. "I can't say. Because I was lonely, maybe. Because I had a premonition, maybe, that you were in trouble. I didn't think about it. I just came."

"Do you want to move out for good?"

"I don't know. I'd like to be able to stay with you, Paul. If only. The pain. Would. Stop." Drifting away from him again. Her voice dreamy and halting. "A river of mud flowing through my head," she murmured. Flopping down on the bed, face in arms. Macy went to her with comfort. Such as he could offer. Stroking her tenderly despite the ache behind his eyes. Again, it seemed, the curious flow of strength had taken place. From her to him. The odd sudden reversal of roles, the comforter becoming the comforted. Ten minutes ago she had been striving to put him back together, now she was crumpled and flaccid. And Hamlin thinks this girl is destructive. A monster, a villainess. Poor pitiful monster.

She said indistinctly, not looking up, "Your Rehab Center phoned again this morning. A doctor with a Spanish name."

"Gomez."

"Gomez, yes, I think so."

"And?"

Pause. "I told him the whole thing. He was very upset."

"What did he say?"

"He wanted to see you right away. I said no, it was impossible, Hamlin would attack you if you went near the Rehab Center. He didn't appear to believe that. I think I convinced him after a while."

"And then?"

"He said finally he'd have to discuss things with his colleagues, he'd call back in a day or two. Said I should phone him if there were any important new developments."

Macy considered calling him now. Wake the bastard up. Yank him from his bed of pleasure. He could be at the Rehab Center by one, half past one in the morning; maybe they could give him a shot of something while Hamlin was dormant, knock him out for keeps. Lissa vetoed the idea. Hamlin's not as dormant as you think, she said. He's down, but not out. Sitting there trying to collect some of his power. No telling what he'll do if he feels threatened. Macy searched his cerebral crannies for Hamlin and could not find him, but left Gomez unphoned anyway. The risks were too great. Lissa probably was right, Hamlin still maintaining surveillance down there, capable of taking severe and possibly mutually fatal defensive action if attempt is made to reach the Center. I don't dare try calling his bluff. They prepared for bed. Flesh against flesh, but no copulatory gestures. He was carrying too heavy a burden of fatigue to think about mounting the doubtfully willing Lissa just now. Still obsessed by the image of the stranger balling her in the university ruins, too. Tomorrow's another day, heigh-ho! As Macy was falling asleep he heard her say, "Gomez

doesn't want me to stay with you any more. He thinks I'm dangerous for you."

"Because you awakened Hamlin in me?"

"No, I didn't go into that with him. I didn't say anything to him about my Gift."

"Then why?"

"Because I'm out of your other life, is why. You aren't supposed to be seeing Nat Hamlin's cast of characters, remember? They conditioned you against it."

"He knew who you were?"

"I told him I used to model for Nat. Our accidental meeting on the street. He pretty much ordered me to go away from you."

"Is that why you walked out tonight?"

"How do I know?" she said petulantly. Curling close against him. Tips of her breasts grazing his back. Turn around and do her? No. Not tonight. That lousy meddling fucker Gomez. Like to tell him a thing or two. If only I could. If only. What a bitching mess. But tomorrow's another day. She's snoring already, anyway. Let her rest. Maybe I will too. To sleep. Perchance to dream.

Three days of relative tranquility. Friday, Saturday, Sunday. His first weekend with Lissa. No news out of Hamlin, save only some irregular psychic belchings and rumblings. Obviously the shot that Lissa had given him had left him pretty feeble. No news out of Gomez, either. A quiet weekend together. Where to go, what to do? The first edge of summer heat lapping the city. We stay in bed late. We screw to Mozart. Dee-dum-dee-dum-dee-dum-dum, diddy-dum

diddy-dum diddy-dum. Her legs up over his shoulders in a nicely wanton way. Her eyes aglow afterward in the shower. Playful, kittenish. Soaping him, trying to get him up again and succeeding. For a man of my mature years I'm pretty virile, *hein?* Laughter. Breakfast. The morning news coming out of the slot. Then out of the house. Her mood already descending; he could sense her turning sullen, starting to withdraw. It just didn't seem possible to keep her happy more than two hours at a stretch. He tried to ignore her darkening outlook, hoping it would go away. Such a beautiful day. The golden sunlight spilling out of the Bronx. Where do you want to go, Lissa? She didn't answer. It seemed almost that she hadn't heard him. He asked again. "Voices," she muttered. "These fucking voices. I'm a crapped-up Joan of Arc." Lissa? Lissa? Turning toward him, torment in the ocean-colored eyes. "A river of mud," she said. "Thick brown mud piling up in my head. Coming out my ears, soon. A delta on each side."

"It's such a beautiful day, Lissa. The whole city's ours."

"Wherever you want to go," she said.

At his random suggestion they went to the Bronx Zoo. Wandering hand in hand past the cunning habitat groups. Hard to believe that those lions really had no way of jumping the moat. And what kept those birds from flying out of their dome? Wide open on one side, for Christ's sake! But of course they did clever things with air pressure and ion-flows these days. The zoo was crowded. Families, lovers, kids. Most of them funnier-looking than the population behind the moats. The raucousness of the animals. Wet twitching noses, sad eyes. Every third cage or so was marked with a grim black star,

signifying, *Species Extinct Except In Captivity*. White rhinoceros. Pygmy hippo. Reticulated giraffe. European bison. Black rhinoceros. South American tapir. Wombat. Arabian oryx. Caspian tiger. Red kangaroo. Bandicoot. Musk-ox. Grizzly bear. So many species gone. Another hundred years, nothing left but dogs and cats and sheep and cattle. But of course the Africans had needed meat in the famine years, before the Population Correction. The South Americans, the Asians. All those babies, all those hungry mouths, and still it hadn't done any good, by the end of it they were eating each other after the animals were gone. Now the zoos were the last refuge. And for some it was too late. Macy remembered a trip with his father, when he was a boy, ten, twelve years old, the San Diego Zoo, seeing the giant panda they had there. "That's the last one left in the world, son. Smuggled out of Commie China just before the blowup." A big two-toned fuzzy toy sitting in the cage. No giant pandas left anywhere, now. Some stuffed ones, as reminders. His father? The San Diego Zoo? Really? Who was his father? Where had he grown up? Had he ever been to the San Diego Zoo? Did they truly have a giant panda there, once? The oscillations of memory. Surely it had never happened. Perhaps there had never been any such animal.

Lissa said, "I can feel their minds. The animals."

"Can you?"

"I never realized I could. I never went to the zoo before."

He was poised, wary, ready to rush her toward the tube if the impact overwhelmed her. It wasn't necessary. She was joyful, ecstatic, standing in the

plaza by the seal tank and drinking in the oinks and bleats and honks and nyaaas of a hundred alien species. "Maybe I can transmit some of what I'm getting to you," she said, and held both his hands and frowned earnestly at him and peered into his eyes, so that passersby nodded and smiled at the sight of true love being expressed between the seals and the tigers, but he was unable to pick up a shred of what she sent him. So she described it, in intermittent bursts, whenever she could spare him a moment out of her contemplations. The high piping throaty thoughts of the giraffe. The dull booming ruminations of the rhino. The dense, complex, bleak and bitter output of the African elephant, he of the big ears, a Kierkegaard of zoology. The sparkling twitter of the chimps. The flippant outbursts of the raccoon. The Galapagos tortoise pondered eternity; the brown bear was surprisingly sensual; the penguins dreamed icy dreams. "Are you making all this up?" he asked her, and she laughed in his face, like Aquinas accused of inventing the Trinity. Within an hour she was wholly spent. They snacked on algaeburgers and Lenin soda, and took the conveyor to the exit. Lissa giggling, manic, stoned on her beasts. "The orangutan," she said. "I could tell you exactly how he'd vote in the next election. And if I could only let you hear the gnu! Oh, shit, the gnu!"

But she was brooding again before dark. They went into Manhattan in the afternoon, circling around the burned-out places and drifting through the flamboyant new downtown section, and he tried to interest her in the amusement parlors, the sniffer palaces, the swimming tanks, and such, only she was glassy and distant. They had dinner

at a Chinese restaurant on one of the Hudson piers, and she picked idly at her food, leaving most of it, getting clucked at by the waiter. A quiet evening at home. We have no friends, Macy realized. They played Bach and smoked a lot. Just before bedtime Hamlin seemed to stretch and yawn within him, or was it an illusion? Bad sex that night, Lissa very far down, he not much better, both of them clumsy and halfhearted as they groped each other in bed. He tried to go into her and she was dry. Persevered, God knows why. Finally some lubrication. Not much response from her, though. Like fucking a robot; he was tempted to quit in the middle, but thought it would be impolite, and he chased himself on to a solitary, unrewarding conclusion. Some nasty dreams later, but nothing he hadn't had before.

Saturday a fizzle. Lissa vacant, absent. An endless day. Sunday much better. Throwing herself on him at sunrise, straddling him. Good morning, good morning, good morning! After which she fixed a hearty breakfast. Bouncy, a breathless adolescent giddiness about her, perhaps fake: trying hard to be a good companion, he suspected. After that sulking bitchy day she gave me yesterday. Lose one, win one.

"Where to?" she asked.

"Museum of Modern Art," he suggested. "They've got some Hamlins there, don't they?"

"Five or six, yes. But do you really think it's wise to go? I mean, he's been so quiet the last couple of days. The sight of his work might stir him up again."

"That's exactly what I want to find out," he told her. They went. The museum, it developed, had *seven* Hamlins,

two big pieces almost though not quite as impressive as the *Antigone*, and five minor objects. They all were on display in the same room, four grouped in one corner and three assembled against the opposite wall, which gave Macy the opportunity for a critical test: would the presence of so much of Nat Hamlin's handiwork arouse the submerged artist by some process of psychic leverage? Boldly Macy planted himself between the two groupings, where he would be exposed to the maximum output of the pieces. Well, Hamlin? Where are you? But though Macy detected some cloudy subliminal squirmings, there was nothing else to indicate Hamlin's existence within him. He studied the sculptures closely. The connoisseur making his lofty observations. Only a few weeks ago, in Harold Griswold's office, the sight of a Hamlin piece had knocked him slappy, and here he was listening critically to the resonances, noting the subtle recurvings of the contours, doing the whole art-appreciation number with great aplomb. Some kids in the room, researching a report on Hamlin, maybe. Apparently recognizing him. Looking at his face, then at his Rehab badge, then at his face again, then at the sculptures, then at each other. Whispering. Even that didn't bother him, being found out as the walking zombie relict of the great artist. The kids didn't dare approach him. Macy gave them a benevolent smile. I'd give you my autograph if you asked. With these very hands, you know, those masterpieces were created. He was impressed by his newfound resilience. To come here, to confront Hamlin's work, to take it all so calmly. Although not entirely calmly. He found the sight of these pieces gradually stirring in him that

dismal depressing nostalgia, that yearning to have access to the past in which this body had brought into being those sculptures. His true past. As he was starting to regard it. Implying that his own past was unsatisfactory, insufficient, unsubstantial, inadequate. As if he too had come to agree with Hamlin that he was mere fiction, a freakish aberrant unreality that had been appended to Nat Hamlin's authentic life. So he craved knowledge of that other time. Who was I when I was he? How did I bring forth these works? What was it like to be Hamlin? A bad moment. The subtle corrosive influence of Hamlin within me, undermining me even when he's quiescent. So that I have begun to doubt myself. So that I have started to scorn myself. And hunger to be him. This is the road to surrender; let me turn from it.

Lissa seemed troubled by the Hamlin group too. Remembering a jollier past, perhaps. The happy days of first love. The awesome sensation of being chosen by Nathaniel Hamlin for his bed, for his studio. A world of endless surprises before her. All highways open. And to have come to this. How great the contrast. Macy could see the bleakness spreading across her face. A mistake to inflict Hamlin's art on her? Or maybe she merely felt oppressed by the museum's Sunday throng. We will go now, I think.

Midmorning, Monday, Macy hard at work. Griswold had just assigned him to a new story. Preliminary charisma-level statistics for the 2012 election came out last night, late; let's do a feature on all the candidates, run up a chart of pulse-figures, hormone-counts, recognition profile, the whole

multivalent works, right? Right. And so to the task. Research assistants scurrying madly. Their pretty pink boobies bobbling. Stacks of documents. Fredericks stopping by to offer bland, useless suggestions. Loftus staggering in with a load of simulations and color overlays for his approval. The hours whisking swiftly by; the mind fully engaged in purposeful activity. And then an unscheduled interruption. Someone down here to see you, Mr. Macy. No appointment. A visitor for me? Who? Image of Lissa, bedraggled, obsessed, freaking out in the reception hall. Please, I must see him, matter of life and death, I'm going to snap, I'm going to blow, let me go upstairs! A messy scene. Only his visitor wasn't Lissa. His visitor turned out to be a Dr. Gomez.

Panic. Gomez, here? Hamlin'll kill me!

After the first quick surge of fright, some rethinking. Hamlin had warned him not to go to the Rehab Center, or to telephone his doctors, yes. But the doctor had come to him. Was that covered by the threat? A debatable point. In any case, Hamlin didn't seem to be raising objections. Macy waited a long troubled moment, expecting a sign from within, a squeeze of his heart, a pinching of his nerves, some sort of don't-fool-around signal. Nothing. He sensed Hamlin's presence like a dull heavy weight in his gut, but he got no specific instructions about seeing Gomez. Perhaps Hamlin wants to find out what Gomez will say. Maybe he's still recovering from the jolt Lissa gave him. Anyway. Tell Dr. Gomez he can come up.

Gomez, out of context, looked unfamiliar. At the Rehab Center, sur-

rounded by his phalanxes of computers and his electronic pharmacopeia, Gomez was dynamic, formidable, aggressive, indomitable, confidently vulgar. Entering Macy's sleek office he was almost meek. Without his throne and scepter a king's but a bifurcated radish. Gomez came slipping hesitantly through the fancy sliding door. Dressed in excessively contemporary business clothes, greens and reds, much too young for him, instead of the customary monochrome lab outfit. Looking shorter and more plump than in his own domain. His thick drooping mustache seedy and in need of trimming. The weakness of his chin somehow mattering much more here. Ten feet apart; eyes meet eyes. Gomez moistening his lips. How strange to see him on the defensive. Macy said, "I guess you've decided to believe me after all."

"We've been discussing your case nonstop for three days," said Gomez hoarsely. "But I had to have first-hand data. And since you wouldn't come to us—"

"Couldn't."

"Couldn't." Gomez nodded. Scowled. Not at Macy but at himself. His distress was apparent. Coming here today was a considerable gesture. The cocky doctor eating crow. He said, voice ragged, "I didn't want to chance phoning you. In case it might provide too much time for the former ego to build up negative reactions. Is my presence here causing any repercussions?"

"Not so far."

"If it does, tell me and I'll leave. I don't want to endanger you."

"Don't worry, Gomez, I'll tell you fast if anything begins." Checking to

see if Hamlin is stirring. All calm. "Hamlin hasn't been very active since Thursday night."

"But he's still there?"

"He's there, all right. Despite your loud assurance that it wasn't possible for him to come back."

"We all make mistakes, Macy."

"That was a pretty fucking big one. I asked you to run an EEG. You said no, I was merely hallucinating, merely having a fantasy, there was no chance in the world that Hamlin was intact and surfacing. And then you said—"

"All right. Let's not go into that now." Dabbing at his sweaty forehead. "I'm concerned with therapy for this, not with placing blame. When did it start?"

"The day I left the Center. When I met the girl, Hamlin's old model, mistress, the one you spoke to a couple of times on the telephone."

"Miss Moore."

"Yes. Bumped into her, literally, on the street. I told you all this. She kept calling me Nat, ignoring my badge—you remember?"

"I remember."

"I saw her again, last Monday. She said she was in trouble and wanted me to help her. I didn't want to get involved and started to leave. She hit me with a two-pronged blast of telepathy. Which woke him up fully, completing the job of arousing him that had started when—"

"Telepathy?"

"ESP. Communication between minds. You know."

"I know. This girl's a telepath?"

"I'm trying to tell you."

"You knew she was a telepath, and also that she was a figure out of Hamlin's past who you therefore were under



instructions not to see, and nevertheless you arranged to meet her and—”

“I *didn't* know she was a telepath. Until it was too late. Not that I'd have had any particular reason to avoid her because of that. You never said anything about telepaths, Gomez. I didn't even know there were such things as telepaths, not real ones, not walking around in New York City.”

Gomez closed his eyes. “All right. I get the picture. What we have here is an apparent case of induced identity-reestablishment under telepathic stimulus. Of all the shit. A minute theoretical possibility, but who ever expected to run into an actual case of—no fucking literature on the whole subject—no tests, no background, no data—”

“You can write a wonderful paper on me some day,” Macy said bitterly.

“Spare me the crap. You think I'm happy about this?” Indeed genuine agony was visible in Gomez' fleshy features. “Okay, so she woke Hamlin. Meaning what? Give me the symptomology.”

“He talks to me.”

“Out loud?”

“In my head. A silent voice, but it doesn't seem silent. Twice now he's tried to grab my speech centers. All he can say is gibberish, though, and I knock him away. He also took hold of the muscles of the right side of my face once. I made him let go. Two or three times he's given me a physical shock, a jolt, knocked me down. Last Tuesday, when I set out to the Rehab Center, he staged a little heart attack for me, telling me that he'd give me a niftier one if I persisted in going to the Center. This is no goddamn hallu-

cination, Gomez. I've had conversations with him, long rational conversations. He's got very ambitious ideas. He's been inviting me to let him finish me off so he can have his body back.”

“Obviously we can't allow that.”

“Obviously there isn't a fucking thing you can do. If I let you make any hostile moves toward him at all, he'll kill me. It's like I'm carrying a bomb inside me.”

“He's bluffing.”

“You're very sure of that,” Macy said.

“If your body dies, he'll die with it. Whatever he is, he can't survive the decay of your brain cells.”

“He can't survive another round in the Rehab Center, either. So he'd be willing to take any step to keep me from going there, right up to and including killing us both. If I go to you, he dies. Why shouldn't he kill me anyway and take me along? Or at least threaten to, knowing it'll stop me from going to the Center?”

Gomez considered that. He didn't seem to arrive at any immediate conclusions.

Macy said. “I'll tell you what's going to happen. One of two things. He'll knock me out and take over the body, or I'll find some way of chopping him up so he can't hurt me.”

“You're playing dangerous games, Macy. Come to the Center. I know Hamlin better than you do: he won't carry out his threat, he won't do anything ultimately to harm you. Killing you would mean the decay and ruin of his own physical self, the last legitimate vestige of Nat Hamlin in the world. He wouldn't do it. He's always been body-proud.”

"Balls. I'm no gambler. He said keep away from you and I'm going to keep away."

"We can't let you remain at large with the ego of a condemned criminal in partial control of your brain," Gomez said.

"What will you do, then? Order my arrest? He'll kill me. I believe him when he says that. Do you want to take the chance? It isn't your life on the line, Gomez. You've been wrong in this case once already."

Twitchings of the mustache-tips. The tongue moving restlessly between teeth and lips. Gomez in a pickle. Macy staring across the desk at him. He felt his heart hammering. Was it Hamlin, waking up? Or just the excitement, the adrenalin flow?

Gomez said finally, "We'll have to put you under surveillance. The legal problems, the presence of a potentially dangerous criminal in you. But we'll keep our distance. We won't jeopardize you."

"How will you know whether you're jeopardizing me or not?"

"A signal," Gomez suggested. "Wait." Frowning. "Let's say that when Hamlin is threatening you, you clap your right hand to your left shoulder. So."

"So." Clap.

"That'll tell us to back off, so we don't provoke him. And when you want us to withdraw from the vicinity entirely, that is, when you feel that you're in extreme danger, you also clap your left hand to your right shoulder. So."

"So." Clap. Clap. Idiocy. "How about a secret password, too?"

"I'm trying to help you, Macy. Don't be clever."

"Is there anything else you want to tell me, or can I get back to my work now?"

"One more signal, if you don't mind."

"The one that I use in asking for permission to take a crap?"

"The one to tell us that Hamlin is dormant and that it would be safe for us to seize you. Do you agree that it's possible such a situation might arise? All right, then. That would be our opportunity to grab you and try to exorcise him completely, fast. But only when you give the signal."

"Which is?"

Gomez thought a moment. Deep concentration. All this Boy Scout stuff must really strain his mind. Finally: "Hands locked together behind neck. Like so."

"So," Macy said, imitating. "You won't let your goons mix up the signals, will you?"

"Just keep them straight in your own head and we'll manage to look after ourselves," Gomez said. He moved toward the door. Looking back, shaking his head. "A case of demonic possession, that's what this is. Holy shit. The seventeenth century rides again! But we'll get this corrected, Macy. We owe you an uncrapped-up life, a life without these complications." Pausing by the exit. "If you want to know what's good for you, by the way, I recommend you stop screwing around with Miss Moore. You're living with her, aren't you?"

"More or less."

"You were strongly advised not to get into any entanglements linked to your body's former identity. Specifically including picking up Nat Hamlin's old mistresses, telepaths or not."

"Should I boot her out on her ass? She's a human being. She's got problems. She needs help."

"She's the cause of all your problems, too. It's about ten to one you wouldn't be saddled with Hamlin in the first place if you hadn't gotten involved with her."

"That's easy to tell me now. But I *have* Hamlin, and I feel a responsibility toward her, too. She's a wreck. She needs an anchor, Gomez, somebody to keep her from drifting away."

"What's the matter with her?"

"The ESP. It's driving her out of her mind. She picks up voices—half the time she doesn't know who she is—she has to hide from people, to shield herself—the telepathy comes and goes, random, not under her conscious control at all. It's like a curse."

"And this you need?" Gomez asked. "You're such a solidly established individual yourself that you can keep company with dynamite like this?"

"It wasn't my idea, believe me. But now that I'm involved with her, I'm not going to toss her out. I want to help her."

"How?"

"Maybe there's some way of disconnecting this ESP of hers. It's burning out her mind. What do you say, Gomez? Could it be done?"

"I don't know item one about ESP. I'm a Rehab specialist."

"Who does know?"

"I suppose I could find out if there are any hospitals in the metropolitan area with experience in this. Some neuropsychiatric division must be pissing around with ESP. If she hates it so much, why hasn't she gone in to be examined?"

"She's afraid to let anyone fool with her mind. Afraid that she'll end up

losing her whole personality if they try to rip out the telepathy."

"Shit. You tell me you want to help her, and two seconds later you tell me she's scared of being helped. This is crazy, man. The girl is poison. Get her into a hospital."

"Tell me where to send her," Macy said. "I'll see if I want to do it. And if she does." He gave Gomez a sudden savage grin and clapped his right hand to his left shoulder. A moment afterward he put his left hand on his right shoulder. Gomez stared at him, blinking, not moving at all. "Well, dummy?" Macy asked. "You forgot your own signals? That's the one for withdrawing from the vicinity."

"Has Hamlin begun to threaten you?"

"Don't stand there asking stupid questions. You got the signal. Go. Go. I have work to do. Let me be, Gomez."

"You poor schmuck," Gomez said. "What a lousy thing this is. For all of us." And went. Macy cradled his head in his hands. An ache behind each ear. An ache in his forehead, as though the front of his brain is swollen and pushing against the bone. Practice the signals. Right hand to left shoulder. Left hand to right shoulder. Lock hands behind back of neck. Surveillance. The friendly Rehab Center haunting me too. Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. He thought he could hear Nat Hamlin's ghostly laughter reverberating through the interstices of his frazzled mind. Hey, are you awake, Nat? Did you listen to what Gomez said? Listening now? They're out to get you, Nat. Gomez is after you. To finish the job that he didn't do right the first time. Scared, Nat? I don't mind telling you I am. Because only one of us is going to come out of this whole, at the very best. At the very best, only

one of us.

## ELEVEN

**I**F THEY REALLY did have him under surveillance, he wasn't aware of it. He went through his daily routines. Finished preparing the script for the charisma story on Monday. Taping on Tuesday. Everything smooth. Back and forth from apartment to the office without trouble. Hamlin, surfacing coherently early Tuesday evening for the first time since Thursday, had a pleasant little chat with him, saying nothing about his conference with Gomez or about the abortive takeover attempt of that stoned Thursday evening. Fair is fair, Macy thought. You try to finesse me, I try to sandbag you, but we don't talk about such sordid things. Hamlin chose to turn on the charm, reminiscing a bit about his life and good times. Selected segments of his autobiography come dancing along the identity interface. With subtitles.

### THE ARTIST DISCOVERS HIS GIFT

1984, Orwell's year, the global situation quite thoroughly fucked up on schedule, although not quite as fucked up as the pessimistic old bastard had imagined, and in this small town is twelve-year-old Nat Hamlin, barely pubescent, full of ungrounded wattage and churning unfocused needs. Which small town, where? Mind your own business. The boy is slim and tall for his age. Long sensitive fingers. Father wants him to be a brain surgeon. It's a good living, son, especially now, with all the psychosis flapping in the breeze. You open the skull, you see, and you stick your long sensitive fingers inside and you hop this and you splice that and you amputate this, three thousand dollars, please, and put your money in good growth stocks. The boy isn't lis-

tening. In the attic he models little clay figurines. He has never been to a museum; he has no interest in art. But there is sensual pleasure in squeezing and twisting the clay. He feels a lusty tickle in his crotch and a delicious tension in his jaws when he works with it. Filling the attic with grotesque little images. You sure see the world a funny way, boy. You been looking at some Pee-cas-so, hey? Pee-cas-so, who he? He that old mother from France, he make a million bucks a year turning out this junk. No shit? Where can I see some? And going to the museum, two hours away. Pee-cas-so. That's not how it's spelled. He's pretty good, yeah, yeah. But I'm just as good as he is. And I'm just starting out.

### SOLITARY PLEASURES

The first major piece now adorns the attic. Three and a half feet high. Adapted from one of Picasso's paintings: woman with two faces, body twisted weirdly on its perpendicular axis, a veritable bitch of a challenge for a fourteen-year-old boy no matter how good he is. The creator lies naked before it. Straggly mustache. Pimples on his ass. Act of homage to the muse. Seizes rising organ in left hand. Back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. Oooh and ahhh. Sixty seconds: close to his record for speed. And accuracy of aim. He baptizes the masterpiece with jets of salty fluid. Ah. Ah. Ah.

### AN END TO SUBLIMATION

She has long straight silken golden hair in the out-of-date style favored by girls of this town. Rimless glasses, fuzzy green cashmere sweater, short skirt. We are fifteen. He has lured her to the attic after telling her, shyly, anesthetized by pot, that he is a sculptor. She is a poet whose work appears regularly in the

town newspaper. Appreciates the arts. This village of philistines; the two of us against them all. Look, this I took from Picasso, and these are my early works, and here's what I'm doing now. How strange, Nat, what brilliant work. You mean nobody knows about this? Hardly anybody. Who would understand? I understand, Nat. I knew you would, Helene. You know what? Never worked from a live model. An important step forward in my career. Oh, no, I couldn't, I just couldn't. I mean, I'd be embarrassed to death! But why? God gave you the body. Look, all through history girls have been posing for famous artists. And I have to. How else will I grow as an artist? She hesitates. Well, maybe. Let's smoke first. He brings out the stash. She takes two puffs for every one of his. Giggling. He is deadly serious. Reminds her. Yes, yes, yes. You're sure your mother won't come upstairs? Not a chance, she doesn't give a crap what I do up here. And then. The clothes coming off. Her incandescent body. He can barely look. Fifteen and he's never seen it. Backward for his age, too much time spent alone in the attic. Sweater, bra. Her breasts are heavy; they don't stick out straight when they're bare, they dangle a little. The nipples very tiny, not much bigger than his. Dimples in her ass. The hair down there darker than on her head, and woolier. She looks so incomplete without a prick. His cheeks are blazing. Here, stand like this. Doesn't dare to touch her. Poses her by waving his hands in air. Wishes she'd stand with her legs apart: he isn't sure what it looks like, and he can't see. But she doesn't. She's so stoned, though. He attacks the clay. Yes. Yes. Works furiously. Meanwhile this pos-

ing is turning her on. The artist ought to be naked too, she says. It's only fair. He just laughs. An absurd idea. Couldn't concentrate if. Half an hour. Sweat running down. Tired of posing, she says. Can I stop? They stop. She comes over to him. Leads him on. Put your hand here. And here. Oh. Oh. Oh. Unzipping him. He'll explode. Quick, on top of me. Oh. Oh, God!

#### THE BIG CITY

A small apartment. Dozens of his favorite works crammed around everywhere. The famous art critic visiting him. Tall, serious, silverhaired. The artist is tall and serious too. Nineteen. Why should you go to art school, the critic asks? My boy, you are already a master! Paternal hand fondling Hamlin's shoulder. What you need now is a dealer. With the right sponsorship you could go places. And how young you are. Cheeks still downy. So saying the famous art critic rubs the downy cheek. Staring intently into young artist's eyes. You could make me the happiest man in the world tonight, says famous art critic in tender tones.

#### AT THE GALLERY

Little red circles pasted on every label. Sold. Sold. Sold. Sold. An auspicious debut. All the best people buying. The dealer, fat, glorying in flesh, slapping his back. Twenty-two years old. An instant success. Now scene follows scene helter-skelter, one blurring into the next, sometimes two running at once, split-screen.

#### THE ADVENT OF PSYCHOSCUPTURE

##### UNREQUITED LOVE

##### THE SEDUCTIONS OF WEALTH

##### THE CELEBRATED ACTRESS

##### ALONE ON THE PINNACLE

##### THE TORMENTS OF FAME

THE DAY THE MUSEUM BOUGHT  
EVERYTHING  
MEETING HELENE AGAIN, FIFTEEN  
YEARS LATER  
THE WORLD TRAVELER  
KICKING THE HABIT  
FOUR'S COMPANY, FIVE'S A CROWD  
MY NAME IS LISSA

And the camera speeding up, running wild.

THE ANTIGONE  
THE HEADACHE  
THE BREAKDOWN  
THE FIRST RAPE  
FREAKING OUT ON TERROR  
THE QUARREL WITH HIS WIFE  
FINISHING ANTIGONE  
KNOCKING LISSA DOWNSTAIRS  
OUT OF HIS MIND  
RAPE UPON RAPE  
CAUGHT  
CONVICTED  
OBLITERATED  
AWAKENED

And the sequences jumbled.

ALONE ON THE PINNACLE  
AN END TO SUBLIMATION  
THE BIG CITY  
KICKING THE HABIT  
OUT OF HIS MIND  
AT THE GALLERY  
SOLITARY PLEASURES

THE ARTIST DISCOVERS HIS GIFT

Faster and faster. Names, dates, events, aspirations, swirling in a thick soup of memory, everything merging, all detail lost. Perhaps none of it had ever happened.

—Good night, old buddy.

Lissa was crying softly to herself when he got into bed Tuesday night. He touched her arm and she pulled away from him. Afterward she told him she was sorry for being so unfriendly.

On Wednesday morning, setting out for work, Macy thought he saw one of the Rehab Center minions who Gomez had said would be keeping watch over him. A squat, potbellied man standing at the entrance to the building across the street, holding a newspaper. An awkward exchange of guarded glances. From Macy a flicker of a smile. Me and my shadow. Right hand to left shoulder, hup! Left hand to right shoulder, hup! Hands clasped at back of neck, hup, hup, hup!

That night he suggested that they go downtown to a sniffer palace, but Lissa didn't want to. A quiet evening at home with Brahms and Shostakovich. Near bedtime Lissa said that she had figured out one way for him to get rid of Hamlin.

"How?"

"You could rape somebody and arrange to get caught. And blame it on him. The authorities would see to it that he was completely erased."

"He'd kill me if we were taken into custody," Macy said. A crazy idea. A crazy girl. You could rape somebody and arrange to get caught. Within him Hamlin laughed. Lissa cried again that night, and when Macy asked her if he could help her in any way she made no reply.

There wasn't much for him to do at the network on Thursday—just a half-hour patch-job on a story he had taped the week before. He consumed the rest of the day in trying to look busy. Mainly, with another weekend coming up, he tried to think of things that would divert Lissa and perhaps yank her from the mood of withdrawal that was so frequently enveloping her lately.

He sensed that he was losing her. That she was losing herself. Slipping away into some tepid shoreless sea blanketed by thick blue fog. She hadn't left his apartment in three days. He suspected that she stayed in bed until noon, one in the afternoon, then sat around smoking, playing music, turning pages, daydreaming. Drifting. Floating. She seldom spoke any more. Or even answered his questions: just a grunt or two. Last week Macy had felt hemmed in by other people, what with Lissa sharing his apartment and Hamlin sharing his brain; but now Lissa was spinning this cocoon about herself, and Hamlin too was withdrawn and remote. Macy was experienced in solitude but didn't necessarily like it. This weekend, he decided, we will explore the wonders of the world beyond my door. Rent a car, drive up into the country, two hundred miles, three hundred, however far one must go to find uncluttered pastures. Picnic on the grass. A bosky dell. Romantic fornications beneath the boughs of murmuring fragrant pine trees. If there are any left. And we'll go to find restaurants. I'll ask Hamlin to suggest a few. Hello, hello, are you there? And Saturday night at a Times Square sniffer palace, all glowlight and tinsel, we will inhale the most modern hallucinogens and enjoy two hours of earthy fantasy. Perhaps we will visit the aquarium so that Lissa can eavesdrop on the ponderous leathery reveries of the walruses and the whales. Oh, a fine zealous weekend! Recreation and invigoration and the restoration of our depleted souls! But when Macy reached his apartment that evening Lissa wasn't there. A feeling of *deja vu*: she did this last Thursday too, didn't she? A week gone by

and nothing altered. But there is a difference this time, as his quick search of the closets reveals. She has taken her belongings with her. Cleared out for good.

The easiest thing now was also the hardest. To sit tight, to forget her, to make a life without her. Nothing but trouble and turmoil, wasn't she? The steamy feminine complexities, compounded and exponentialized by the inexplicabilities of telepathy. Let her go. Let her go. A high probability that she'll come back, even as last time. But he couldn't. Damnation. Must go looking for her. The most logical place. Her apartment.

A sweet soft spring night.

Stars on display beyond the towers' tips. Peddlers of blurry dreams sauntering in the streets. Down we go into the tube. Whoosh whoosh whoosh. Transfer to East Side line. Double back on tracks. Her exit. The narrow streets, the decaying buildings, survivors of all the cultural upheavals. Scaly erections protruding from the corpus of the abolished past. Which of these houses is hers? They all look alike. Mysterious figures flitting in alleyways. A visit here is like a journey backward in time. A district of shady deeds and unfathomable espionage; an Istanbul, a Lisbon of the mind, embedded in the quivering fabric of New York. This looks like the right place. I'll go in.

Directory of residents? Don't make me laugh!

Macy squinted through the Jurassic dimness of the cavernous lobby. He caught sight of a figure far away, bent and distorted, which hobbled toward him as he proceeded warily inward. And then the shock of recognition: himself approaching. What he sees is

the image of Paul Macy, reflected in a cracked and warped mirror occupying the nether wall. Laughter. Applause. On six levels of this hostelry holovision sets give forth their offerings with numbing simultaneity. *Lissa? Lissa?* She lived on the fifth floor, didn't she? I'll go up. Knock on her door, if I can find it. Or else ask the neighbors. Miss Moore, the redhaired girl, been away for a week or so? You seen her around here tonight? Not me, man haven't seen a thing. Up the stairs. Where else could she have fled but here? Her nest. Her hermitage. On the fourth landing he paused. Had the hirelings of Gomez followed him here? No doubt. Keeping close watch. Maybe creeping up the stairs behind him, not wanting to let him get out of sight. It was entirely possible that some orderly of the Rehab Center was at this moment a flight or two below him, frozen, waiting for him to resume his climb. And when I take a step he takes a step. And when I stop he stops. And so up and up and up. Gripping the banister, Macy swung his body halfway out over it and peered down the stairwell. In this darkness impossible to tell. Did somebody pull his head in fast, down there? Let's check it. Wait a minute, then pop my head out again. There. Still not sure, though. Well, fuck it. I don't care if they follow me or not. Up we go. Step. Step. *Stop*. Listen. That time I was sure I heard someone behind me. Comforting to know that they look after me where'er I go. Up.

He halted again on the fifth floor landing. Double row of doors receding into infinity. *Lissa* behind one of them, maybe. Perhaps it would be best to give her some warning that he had come for her. Perhaps then she'll come into

the hall, I won't have to go knocking on doors. A deep breath. Sending forth the most intense mental signal he could manage, hoping that it would be on her wavelength. *Lissa. Lissa. It's me, Paul, out by the stairs. I came to get you, baby. You hear me, Lissa?*

No response from anywhere.

Okay. Now we look. He began strolling down the corridor, studying the faceless doors. In a hole like this you don't put nameplates out. He couldn't remember where her room was. At the far end of the hall, somewhere, away from the stairs, but there were dozens of doors down there. Here's one that looks like it might be right. He started to knock, but held back. Shyness? Fear? These strange savage slum people here. Maybe they don't even speak English. And me intruding on their shabby dinnertime. But yet if I don't I'll never find her. Again he started to knock. No. Holovision blasting away in there. Couldn't be her. I'll move on. Here? But they're cooking something in this one. Curried squid. Spider patties. *Lissa? Lissa? Where are you?*

Footsteps in the hall behind him.

Someone running toward him.

Mugger. Slasher. The shadowy pursuer on the stairs. Macy tried to swing around to face his attacker, but before he had completed half a turn the other was upon him, seizing his arms, pulling them up, pinioning him. A big man, as big as he was. They struggled silently in the dark, grunting. A knee rose and jammed itself into the small of Macy's back. He ripped one arm free, clawed at the assailant, tried to get an ear, an eye, any kind of grip. Before the knife flashes. Before the stungun. Lurching, Macy managed to push the other up



against the hallway wall, hard, ramming him with his shoulder, but then he felt his arm, the captive one, being bent back beyond its limits. Wild burst of pain. Desperately Macy banged the other again with his shoulder. Tried to knock his head against the other, hoping to drop him with a single stony smash. No use. No use. The fierce combat raged. Pointless even to call for help; who would open a door in a place like this? Slam and slam and slam. He was fully engaged in the task of defense. Such total concentration. Both of them breathing hard. Putting up more of a fight than he expected, I am! Stalemate. Lucky thing for me there's only one of them. If I could just get my hand free, and bash his head against the hallway wall—

And then. In the most frantic moment of the struggle. An inner convulsion.

Hamlin.

Making his move.

Time fell to stasis, so that Macy could perceive each phase of the conquest in a leisurely, detached way. Hamlin, having collected his strength for some days now, was taking advantage of the hallway battle, of Macy's full absorption in his difficulties, to seize the motor centers of their shared brain. Ripping out connections with both hands, replugging them under his own administration. Macy was tumbling through a timeless abyss. And Hamlin steadily and efficiently consummating what must have been a carefully planned takeover. Right leg. Left leg. Right arm. Left arm. Paralysis setting in, an unexpected summer freeze. Macy sinking and sinking and sinking. No way to defend himself; he had left his flank unguarded, and the

enemy was pouring over the palisade. Down. Down. Down. Very cold now, very still. Where was Gomez' surveillance? Right hand to left shoulder. Left hand to right shoulder. Extreme danger. Hah. Much good that would be. Macy realized that he and Gomez had completely forgotten to devise one important signal, the one that said, *Help, he's taking me over!* Not that anybody was here to help him. Right hand to left shoulder. Left hand to right shoulder. Extreme danger. Down. Down. He has me.

## TWELVE

HE WAS SUBMERGED in a sea of smooth green glass. Wholly engulfed, unable to break through to the surface: above his head a solid sheet, impermeable, infrangible, sealing him away from the air. Choking, lungs bursting, head throbbing. A dull pounding sensation in both his calves; swelling of the toes. Below his dangling feet a fathomless abyss, dark, dense. From far overhead came faint greenish-gold strands of light. Blurred, indistinct images of the upper world. All perceptions refracted and distorted and transformed. His hands pushing desperately at the glassy layer above him. Which would not yield. Oh, God, I must be in hell! How can I breathe? How did he do this to me? How will I get out of here? I must be sinking. Slowly down and down. Toothy fish to pick my bones. He could feel the surging of the currents, rivers in the sea buffeting him as they swept past. He shivered. Terror invaded him. So this is it. He has me. He has me. I am within him.

Macy felt a sharp pang of loss, of displacement. It had been so good liv-

ing in the world. The sunlight, the people, laughter, even the uncertainties, the tensions. To be alive, at least. And then to be overthrown, cast down, evicted, disinherited. He took it all away from me when I wasn't ready to go. It wasn't fair. And now? The pain of this place. The gasping. The choking. The fear.

But he survived the first lurch of terror and discovered that there was no second one. He grew calm. Gradually Macy refined and clarified his awareness of his new condition. He realized that although he could not reach the air, neither would he sink any deeper, nor was the feeling that he was about to drown to be taken literally. In fact this was no sea. All the marine imagery, he understood now, was purely metaphoric. He was indeed submerged, he did indeed dangle between somewhere and somewhere, but he had become a mere electrochemical network spread thinly through the recesses of what he was forced at this stage to regard as the brain of Nat Hamlin. Hamlin was in charge, on top. Macy occupied some indefinable cranny or series of cran- nies. He could not see. He could not feel. He could not speak. He could not hear. He could not move. He was nothing but an abstraction, a disembodied identity. Whether he could properly be said to exist at all was questionable.

Now that the first shock was past, he was startled that the loss of his independence brought no despair. Surprise, yes. Irritation and annoyance, yes. (How slickly Hamlin had outmaneuvered him!) Dismay, yes. (How strange it is to be trapped in here. How claustrophobic. Will I ever be able to

get out again?) But not despair. Not even fear. Hamlin had once been in this very predicament himself, had he not, and he had endured it and mastered it and escaped. Then why not I? There was of course a great temptation to accept the situation complacently and passively. Telling oneself that one had never been entitled to a real existence anyway. That it would be best for everyone concerned, now that the upheaval of selves had come about, if he sat tight in this womblike place. Placidly letting Hamlin have the body to which he held the original birthright. But the temptation did not tempt Macy greatly. Easy though it might be to take up a vegetable existence, he preferred a more active life. A body of his own. The brief taste of living that he had had left him hungry for more. I never really began, after all. Just a few weeks on my own away from the Center. With him bothering me most of that. And now this. I'll fight back. I'll push him out as he pushed me. I may not have been born but I was real and I wish to return to existence.

Patiently he sought to examine his available options. Was it possible to establish sensory input? Let us see. Let us muster our powers of concentration. If we gather our energy—so—and direct it purposefully in a single direction—so—do we make contact with anything? No. No. Glassy darkness is all. And yet. Now. What do we have here? A node, a handle. Which we can seize. To which we can apply a subtle interior pressure. Yes! And we perceive. The inward-rushing flood of sensation. But what do we perceive? Our surroundings. Yes, just like Hamlin told me, you arrive at a kind of percept-surrogate image of the brain

you're in. If only you had paid more attention, at the Center, when they were trying to teach you a little structural anatomy so that they could explain what they'd been doing to your head. The synaptic vesicles. The synaptic cleft. Dendritic spine. Axon terminal. Organelles, filaments, and tubules. Neural mitochondria. Corpus callosum. Anterior commissure. Limbic cortex. Centrencephalic system. Words. Words. This baffling torrent of referentless nouns. But somehow a little comprehension slides through. You poke around, you insinuate yourself, you learn a thing or two. And the darkness clears. Macy sent a tendril of himself down a narrow moist corridor and found, at the end of it, a pulsing pink wall on which a golden honeycomb-textured plate was mounted. The tip of the tendril went into one of the apertures of the honeycomb and a tiny explosion of light resulted. Progress, no? Now we subdivide the tendril, and poke one end of it in here, and one in here, and one in here. Flash flash and flash. Presto jingo, we get an input! A bright cluster of sensory data. As yet what comes in is undifferentiated; it might be sight, sound, touch, smell, anything. But at least there is an input. We will continue. Macy tirelessly probing. Seeking out new avenues of exploration. More honeycombs; more subdividing tendrils slipping into slots; more bursts of light. Will any sense ever come out of this? You are trying to tap a television image, and you can succeed in making contact only with widely scattered phosphors, a dot here and a dot there. Little spiky blurts of information, not enough for comprehension. Not yet. But no one is rushing you. You have no sense of the passage

of time. Take an hour, a minute, a century, a year. Sooner or later you'll have a good hookup. It's just a matter of—what was that? A flash of coherence! Here and gone, but it was a total image. Audio? Visual? You still can't tell, but you know that you had all the information, even if you weren't able to interpret it. It was, say, a complete sentence, subject predicate adverbs adjectives expletives articles punctuation dependent clauses, which Hamlin read or heard or spoke out loud. It was, say, a full sweep of Hamlin's optical reservoir taking in the entire visual input of a fiftieth of a second. It was, say, a spear of abstract thought crossing Hamlin's consciousness from northwest to southeast. Let us now relate such random rootless inputs to our own bank of data. So that we may evaluate. So that we may interpret. So that we can tell sight from sound from cognition. Thus. And thus. We string our telegraph wire across miles and miles of desert and at last it brings us messages.

Such as:

A sense of motion. Jolt jolt jolt, stride stride stride, Hamlin is going somewhere.

A sense of position. Hamlin is standing upright.

A sense of muscular activity. Hips and thighs in action, soles of feet hitting pavement. Hamlin is walking.

A sense of environment. Bright light. Sunlight? General warmth and humidity. Morning? A summer morning? Street noises. He is walking along a street.

A sense of vision, coming jerkily into focus, now clear. Office buildings, pedestrians, vehicles. A street in Old Manhattan?

Riding along as though seated on Hamlin's back, legs around his neck, Macy felt a sharp pang of discontinuity at the absence of proper transitions. At the moment of loss of consciousness this body had been grappling in a slum-building corridor with an unknown assailant, late at night. Now it was walking down a busy daytime street. How much time has passed? What was the outcome of that struggle? What injuries, if any, did the body sustain? Where is Hamlin heading now? None of these things could readily be determined with the resources presently at Macy's command. One can try to improve one's resources, though.

The logical next step, Macy told himself, is to hook into Hamlin's consciousness. So I can read him and maybe hamper him if not entirely control him. A tentacle into the cerebral cortex. But where is the cerebral cortex? Macy could only repeat his previous trial-and-error tactics, groping here, groping there. No luck, though. Impossible to grasp the handles of Hamlin's cerebration. Macy's efforts succeeded only in giving Hamlin's memory-storage regions a high colonic, stirring turbid strata of ancient events. Across the screen of Macy's awareness floated a cloud of mucky particles of experience, miscellaneous rapes, seductions, artistic triumphs, investment decisions, childhood traumas, and indignations, drifting murkily about. While the sensory inputs continued to show Hamlin swinging jauntily along down the sunny street. Now for the first time came desolate moments for Macy. A feeling of hopelessness. A realization of the reality of this unreal captivity. Admissions of defeat, the inevitability and finality of. It was to be expected

that he'd catch me and lock me up in here. A stronger ego than mine. Wilier. He lived 35 years and I lived only four. A criminal mentality, too. He knows how to defend himself. I'll never be able to meddle with him as he did with me. I'll never get out of here. But as he mourned for himself Macy automatically went on searching for the right place to plug in, trying this and that and this, marching into one blind alley after another, battering himself against dead ends and withdrawing to try again. And abruptly he made his connection, tapping into the line he sought and drawing a staggering numbing dizzying but ultimately satisfying current, the pure juice, the unimpeded flow, the hefty amperage of Hamlin's unfettered soul.

Go to see Gargantua first almost there ten minutes more find out what's been going on the business the buying and selling my price these days it must have gone up plenty I bet they figure I'm dead the cocksuckers no more Hamlins so double the price every week well why not and then out to the studio all boarded up I bet just take a little look of course I'll have to pose as Macy that will present some problems won't even be able to let Gargan know the truth outright although I'll drop him some hints that fucking mass of meat he's clever he's clever he'll figure it out won't say a word a buck or two in it for him you bet your fat ass there is so then to the studio a sentimental journey I mean I need to go there like a shrine like my own shrine like like all dusty I bet the Goths and the Vandals fuck fuck fuck they bust everything up maybe I wasn't so pleasant a guy but I had a decent re-

spect for property except of course all those cunts if you consider a cunt property and anyway I was crazy then much better now purified by adversity my head clear at last rid of Macy stuck him where he belongs the poor dumb shit no personality at all just a construct a plastic man well it wasn't his fault but it wasn't mine either the survival of the fittest don't you see Darwin was no dope and then I'll visit Noreen old time's sake I'll have to play it very cagy with her that bitch is perfectly capable of turning me in but maybe not after all nobody ever gave it to her in her life the way I did even if toward the end we were somewhat estranged nevertheless that's part of the normal risks of marriage especially when you marry an officially accredited genius a member of the international elite of artistic achievement high intensity sometimes boils over I'm almost at Gargantua's not I think unless he's moved the gallery four years shit the whole shitting universe changes in four years every cell in the body turns over doesn't it or is it seven years anyway we aren't the same and Gargan probably sells his schlock out of Philadelphia now Chicago Karachi who knows but we'll find out fast enough God it's good just to walk the streets again breathe the air throw my shoulders back and tonight we'll find some friendly hole for dicky dunking yes indeed four years without a piece that's quite a long time for a man of my ability artistic and physical well maybe out in Darien I'll find Noreen willing to come across or one of the others God that creepy Lissa I guess she'd do it she'd do it for anyone even Macy thinking she's really fucking me of course but I don't want her I don't want to go within a million

miles of her too dangerous what a shot in the head she gave me that time I don't want her ever again ever ever I wonder what kind of work I'll turn out as soon as I'm back in the swing of things it better be good if I can't maintain quality might as well give the body back to Macy but I think I'll pick up fast enough do some small pieces first recover my grasp of perspective my perspective of grasp and then we'll see anyway the important thing is that I'm back

—But you still have me, Hamlin.

*Macy. Oh, shit! Macy. I didn't think I'd be hearing from you so soon.*

—Sorry to disappoint you.

*Why don't you just erode away? Dissolve. Let yourself be absorbed by the cranial phagocytes,* Hamlin suggested. *You're over and done with, anyway. Your nebulous existence has ceased to be, Macy. Admit it and go.*

—The Rehab Center failed to program me for autodestruct.

*I don't need you, though.*

—But I do, Macy said.

*What good are you? What imaginable value do you have to the world? To anyone?*

—I have immense value to me. I'm the only me I have. And I want to survive. I'm going to beat you, Hamlin. I'm going to throw you out again and this time I'll abolish you. Just watch and see.

*Please. Your buzzing is giving me a headache and it's such a beautiful day.*

—I'll give you a lot more than a headache.

Noisy threats were pointless. Macy wanted to make some dramatic demonstration of his ability to harass

Hamlin. Give him as good as he got when the tables were turned. Clutch his heart, grab a bundle of muscles in his cheek, shut his eyes, make him piss his pants. Jolt him, but without, naturally, doing real harm to the body they shared. Only he couldn't. Macy's harassment quotient was close to zero. All he could do was ride gain on Hamlin's sensory input and pipe messages directly into his conscious brain. Buzzing. But no control of the motor sectors whatever. No grip on the autonomic system. Merely a passenger who hasn't the foggiest where the throttle might be, or the brakes, or even the switch for the headlights. Meanwhile Hamlin, untroubled, turned a corner and entered the vestibule of a glossy-fronted shop on the smoked-glass window of which danced the words OMNIMUM GALLERIES, LTD. in free-floating globules of green capillary light. Inside, a battery of safety mechanisms bathed him in scanner-glow. An inner door finally rolled aside, and he entered the gallery, pausing not at all to inspect the treasures of contemporary art it displayed. He said to the girl at the desk. "Is Mr. Gargan here?"

"Is he expecting you, sir?"

"I don't think so. But he'll see me."

"Your name?"

Hamlin faltered at that. Macy picked up the scathing tides of chagrin. A dilemma, yes. After a moment Hamlin said, "My name is Macy, Paul Macy." With a meaningful glance at the Rehab badge in his lapel. "Tell him I used to be Nat Hamlin, though."

"Oh." A little gasp. A flutter of confusion; a pretty spasm of embarrassment that turned the girl scarlet down to her fashionably exposed breasts. A quick recovery. Jeweled finger to the

intercom. "Mr. Macy to see you, Mr. Gargan. Paul Macy. Formerly Mr. Nat Hamlin."

From some inner office, a bellow of surprise that needed no amplification. Hamlin was speedily ushered in. A spherical room, dense mossy black carpet installed 360°-wise everywhere, a man of implausible corpulence lolling along the curved left wall with a meaty hand held languidly over a control panel bristling with jeweled switches. Not rising when Hamlin entered. An ocean of blubber; flesh hanging in folds over folds of flesh. The features barely discernible within that mass: piggy little eyes, puggy little nose, narrow pinched puritan lips. Out of the vastness a thin man's piping voice: "God's own cock, what are *you* doing here? You aren't supposed to be coming here, Nat!"

"Do you mind?"

"Do I mind? Do I mind? You know I love you. Only I don't follow this at all. They took you in for Rehab; I thought that was the end of you. When did you get out, anyway?"

"Early in May. I would have seen you before this but there were problems."

"You look okay. You sound okay. Just like your old self. But you've got the badge. You're somebody else now, right? What's your new name?"

"Macy. Paul Macy."

"Don't like it. It's a name without any balls."

"I didn't pick it, Gargantua."

The fat man tugged at his dewlaps. "Am I supposed to call you Nat or Paul?"

"You better call me Paul."

"Paul. Paul. Well, I'll try. Sit down, Paul. Jesus, what a fruity name! Sit

down, anyway." Hamlin sat. Macy, a helpless spectator within him, sat also. Listening to every word of the conversation but unable to speak. As though watching it on a screen. He had seen this fat man, this gallery owner, before, drifting around in the debris of Hamlin's memory; but he seemed much fatter now. This man and Hamlin had grown rich together on the proceeds of Hamlin's genius. Now Hamlin stretched out voluptuously. In full command of his recaptured body. The black carpeting seemed to be a foot thick: bouncy, lush. Gargan touched one of the switches on the panel in front of him and the room silently revolved, changing its axis by some 15°. Hamlin's side of the sphere went up and Gargan's descended. Macy experienced some vertigo. The fat man lay pleasantly sprawled, kneading his belly. Shortly he belched and said, "How do you like the setup here? Or don't you remember the old one?"

"I remember. This is tremendous, Gargantua. Like a fucking Babylonian palace. A gallery for sybarites, eh?"

"We get a good clientele here."

"You're prospering. And you've gained some weight, haven't you? Unless I'm mistaken, quite a lot of weight."

"Quite. Two or three hundred pounds since you last saw me."

"You're beautiful."

"I think so."

"How the crap do you have the patience to eat so much, though?"

"Oh, I don't waste time overeating," Gargan said. "I've had my lipostat surgically adjusted. My whole body-fat-and-glucose equation has been changed. I burn slowly, my friend, I burn very slowly. The eating it takes

to give you an ounce gives me a pound. And I grow lovely, eh, more lovely every day. I want to weigh a thousand pounds, Nat! Paul. I must call you Paul."

"Paul, yes."

"But none of this makes any sense." Gargan stirred ever so slightly, craning his neck. "How can you remember me? Why didn't Rehab wipe you out?"

"It did."

"But you sound just like—"

"I'm a special case. Don't ask too many questions."

"I follow you, Nat."

"Paul."

"Paul."

"Be more careful about my name, will you? I'm a brand new man. The loathsome countersocial rapist who did such grievous damage to so many innocent women has been humanely destroyed, Gargantua, and will never walk the earth again."

"I follow. Where are you living?"

"Way uptown. A temporary place. You can have the address if you want."

"Please. And the phone."

"I won't be there long. As soon as I've got some cash together I'll find something a little more suitable."

"Are you working yet?"

"As a holovision commentator," Hamlin said. "Maybe you've seen me. The late news."

"I mean *working*."

"No. I have no equipment, no studio. I haven't even had a chance to think about work in a serious way."

"But soon?"

"Soon, yes." Macy felt Hamlin's lips curve into a sly, malicious smile. "Would you like to represent me when I get started again, Gargantua?"

"Why ask? You know we have a

contract."

"We don't," said Hamlin.

"I could show it to you. Wait, let me punch the retrieve." Gargan's meaty fingers hovered over the console buttons. As he started to stab a stud Hamlin reached out and stopped him.

"You had a contract with Nat Hamlin," Hamlin said. "Hamlin's dead. You can't represent his ghost. My name is Paul Macy, and I'm looking for a dealer. You interested?"

Gargan's face looked puffer. "You know I am."

"Fifteen percent."

"The old contract said thirty."

"The old contract was signed twenty years ago. The situation then doesn't apply now. Fifteen."

Lengthy tugging at dewlaps. "I never take less than thirty."

"You will if you want me to come back to you." The voice very flat now. "All Hamlin's contracts were legally dissolved when his personality underwent deconstruct. I'm not bound by anything. Also I'm without assets and I need to rebuild my capital in a hurry. Fifteen. Take it or leave it."

In Gargan's eyes a countervailing slyness. "Nat Hamlin was an established master with a line of museum credits longer than my cock. Paul—what is it, Macy?—Paul Macy is a nobody. I had a waiting list for Hamlins, for anything he'd turn out. Why should people buy you?"

"Because I'm as good as Hamlin."

"How do I know that?"

"Because I tell you so. Business may be slow at first until the word-of-mouth starts, but when the public realizes that Macy is as good as Hamlin, even better than Hamlin because he's been through an extra hell and knows how to make

use of it, the public will come around and clean you out. You'll cover your nut with plenty to spare. Do we have a deal at fifteen or don't we?"

"I want to see some of Paul Macy's work," Gargan said slowly, "before I offer a contract."

"Contract first or you don't see a thing."

A tut and a tut from the narrow lips. "Artists aren't supposed to be rapacious. That's why they need dealers, to be sons of bitches on their behalf."

"I can be my own son of a bitch," Hamlin said. "Look, Gargantua, don't waltz around with me. You know who I am and you know how good I am. I've had a rough time and I need money, and anyway at this stage of my career it's crazy for me to be cutting my dealer in for thirty. Give me a contract and advance me ten thousand so I can set up a studio, and let's not crap around any more."

"And if I don't?"

"There are two dozen dealers within five blocks of here."

"Who would jump at the chance of taking on somebody named Paul Macy, I suppose?"

"They'd know who I really was."

"Would they? The Rehab process is supposed to be foolproof. Suppose this is all a clever hoax? Suppose you *are* Paul Macy, and somebody's coached you on how to sound like Nat Hamlin, and you're just trying to sweat some quick cash out of me?"

"Test me. Ask me anything about Hamlin's life." Macy sensed Hamlin's distress now. Adrenalin flooding. Pores opening. Genitals contracting.

"I don't play guessing games," said Gargan. Idly he punched a button; the room tilted the other way. Hamlin's



intestines lolled. The dealer said, "You've got no leverage, friend. No reputable dealer would trust a Rehab reconstruct who says he's still got the skills of his old self. So the take-it-or-leave-it is on my side. I'll sign you, Paul, because I'm sentimental and I love you, loved you in the old days, anyway, and I'll even give you some money to start you up again. But I won't be blackjacked. Twenty-five percent and nothing lower."

"Twenty."

"Twenty-five." A gargantuan yawn. "You're starting to bore me, Paul."

"Don't get snotty. Remember who you're talking to, what kind of talent you've got sitting next to you here. A year from now you'll regret having muscled me. Twenty percent, Gargantua."

"Twenty-five."

Now Hamlin was plainly upset. The swagger was gone; his ductless glands were working overtime. Macy, who had not ceased to probe avenues of neural connections, thought he had found a good one and that this might be a suitable moment for making a try at retaking the body. He pressed hard. Lunged. Claws outstretched, attacking the cerebral switchboard. But no go. Hamlin brushed him away as though he were a mosquito and said aloud, "Let's split the difference. Twenty-two and a half and I'm yours."

An hour's smooth drive in a rented car brought Hamlin to his old Connecticut estate. The car did its best to cope with Hamlin's surprising ineptness as a driver. He handled the steering-stick crudely, overpushing it, frequently trying to override the car's gyroscopic mind, constantly messing up the deli-

cate homeostasis that kept the vehicle in its proper lane. Macy, from his vantage-point within, monitored Hamlin's performance with mixed feelings. Obviously Hamlin, four or five years away from driving, had lost whatever skill at it he once had had, and that was worrying him, for it had occurred to him that in his absence he might have lost other skills also. Therefore he was working himself into a singleminded frenzy of concentration, gripping the stick in sweaty palm and trying to psych himself into complete mastery over the car. Macy knew he could play on Hamlin's fears, intensifying his distress. *You think you've come back to life, Nat, but nothing came back except your ego and your dirty mouth. You've lost your manual skills. You couldn't cut paper dolls now, let alone turn out museum masterpieces.* And so on. Undermining Hamlin's self-confidence, attacking his main justification for having expelled his reconstruct. Weakening his grip on the body's central nervous system, setting him up for a push. *You think you're still a great artist? Jesus, you don't even know how to drive! The Rehab Center smashed you to bits, Nat, and you won't ever be whole again.* And then, getting Hamlin fuddled and panicky, he could make a try for a takeover. The process was already well under way. The fumes of Hamlin's tensions drifted through Macy's interior holdfast. The oily smell of fear and doubt. Go on, give him a shove, he's vulnerable now. But the scheme was futile, Macy knew. He hadn't yet found the handles with which he could flip Hamlin out of his dominant position. Even if he had, he wouldn't dare attempt a takeover at 120 miles an hour; no matter how good this car's homeos-

tasis was supposed to be, it wasn't programmed for self-drive, and while he and Hamlin struggled for control the auto might go over the edge of the embankment, or up a wall, or into the oncoming flow, in some wild uncorrected orgy of positive feedback. So Macy sat passive while Hamlin shakily negotiated the highway and more capably guided the car up the winding leafy country lanes to the place where he once had lived. Parking the car perhaps a quarter of a mile away. Leaving the road, walking cautiously through the woods. Heartbreaking summeriness here. The foliage so green and new. Bright yellow and white flowers. Chipmunks and squirrels. Clumps of frondy ferns. They had held back the urban tide here, the surging sea of concrete and pollution, the onslaught of extinctions. An outpost of natural life, maintained for the very rich. And there, beyond that blinding white stand of stunning birches, the house. Lofty walls of high-piled gray-brown boulders set in ancient gray mortar. Leaded glass windows agleam in the noonlight. Hamlin's heart leaping and bouncing. Old memories in an agitated dance. Look, look there. The pond, the creek, the pool. Exactly as Lissa had described it, exactly as Macy had seen it through the lens of Hamlin's reminiscing mind. And the studio annex. Where so many miracles were worked.

—Why did you come here?

*A pilgrimage. A sentimental journey.*

—It's somebody else's house now.

*Why don't you go fuck yourself, Macy?*

—I have your welfare at heart. You can't just prowl around here. It may be patrolled by dogs. Scanners every-

where. You know what'll happen to you if you're caught?

Hamlin didn't reply. He edged toward the studio, and Macy picked up an inchoate scheme for forcing a window and getting inside. Hamlin seemed to expect to find his workshop intact, all the elaborate psychosculpting apparatus still sitting where he had left it. Folly. The studio was probably some blithery suburbanite matron's greenhouse now. Hamlin continued to slink through the copse bordering the creek. Let him try, let him just try. The alarm will go off and the place will be full of cops in ten minutes. A frantic chase through the woods. Snubnosed shiny cyberhounds snuffling on silent treads over last year's fallen leaves, homing in on the fleeing man's telltale thermals. The fugitive encircled, entrapped, seized. Identified as Paul Macy, Rehab reconstruct, but the police, checking with Gomez & Co., would swiftly discover that Macy had been plagued by a resurgence of his prior identity. And then. Swift action. Wham! Needles in his arm. Hamlin reamed out a second time. What about his threat to destroy their shared body in case of trouble? No, Macy thought, he can't do it, not while he's up there running the conscious brain. A man can't simply shut off his own heartbeat by willing it. He could when he was down here where I am, plugged into all the neural connections, but he can't do it now. So Hamlin will die a second time, and the body will survive. For me to have. Go on, Nat, creep and creep and creep, bust into your studio, trip the alarm, summon the hounds, start me on the road back to independent life. Yes. I'll be so very grateful.

What's this rising from the pool,

though? Blithery suburban matron herself! Venus on the half shell. Woman in her middle forties, tall, not exactly plump but well endowed, dark hair, long arching waist, thickish thighs, amiable vacuous face. Her snatch chastely shielded by a skimpy cache-sexe; breasts bare, full, probably not as high as they used to be. Staring in surprise at Hamlin advancing toward her.

Quick adrenal response from Hamlin, too. Pupils dilated, heartbeat accelerated, prick stiffening. No wonder he's excited. The quintessential rape situation. Daytime, suburbs, woman alone, scantily clad, man emerges out of woods. Flung her down, hand over mouth, spread the thighs, give her the ram. *Ooom*. Load the box and prance away. Another notch carved in your cock.

—Aha! Still at it. Your old tricks.

*Don't bother me*, Hamlin snapped. Making an effort, recovering his sexual equilibrium, his social poise. Giving her a sexosocial smile and a little genteel nod. Everything under control. "I hope I didn't startle you, ma'am." The voice unctuous.

"Not fatally." Her eyes fluttering from his face to the Rehab badge and back to face. A little confused but not alarmed. She didn't try to cover her breasts despite the potential provocativeness of the situation. The cheerful poise of the upper crust. "Forgive me if I'm making a terrible mistake, but aren't you—weren't you—"

"Nat Hamlin, yes. Who used to live here. But my name is Paul Macy now."

—Liar!

"I recognized you at once. How pleasant of you to visit us!" Obviously unaware of the impropriety of a recon-

struct's visiting his earlier self's old haunts. Or not caring. "Lynn Bryson, by the way. We've been here two years now. My husband is a helix surgeon. Shall I get you a drink, Mr. ah Macy? Or something to smoke?"

"No, thank you, Mrs. Bryson. You bought the place from Hamlin's ah widow?"

"From Mrs. Hamlin, yes. Such a fascinating woman! Naturally she didn't care to stay here any longer, with such terrible memories on all sides. We struck up a wonderful friendship during the time when the house was changing hands."

"I've heard many fine things about her," Hamlin said. "Of course I have no recollection of her. You understand."

"Of course."

"Hamlin's past is a closed book to me. But you understand I have a certain natural curiosity about the people and places of his life. As if he were, in a sense, a famous ancestor of mine, and I felt I should know more about him."

"Of course."

"Does Mrs. Hamlin still live in this area?"

"Oh, no, she's in Westchester now. Bedford City, I believe."

"Remarried?"

"Yes, of course."

The knife turning in Hamlin's gut.

"You happen to know her new husband's name?" Very carefully, concealing all traces of tension.

"I could find it," the woman said. "A Jewish name. Klein, Schmidt, Katz, something like that, a short word, Germanic. A person in the theater, a producer maybe, a very fine man." Her smile grew broader. Her eyes appraised

Hamlin's body with complacent sensuality. As if she wouldn't mind some pronging. Her vicarious way of attaining intimacy with the departed great artist. She should only know. Off with that bit of plastic about her waist, down on the grass, the white fleshy thighs parting. *Ooom*. "Won't you come with me?" she said airily. "I have it in the house. And you'll want to see the house, anyway. The studio. Do you know, we've kept Mr. Hamlin's studio exactly as it was when he—before he—when his troubles started—"

"You have?" A wild interior leap. Excited. "Everything still intact?"

"Mrs. Hamlin didn't want any of his things, so they came to us with the house. And we thought, well, the way they have Rembrandt's house on display in Amsterdam, or the house of Rubens in what is it Antwerp, so we would keep Nathaniel Hamlin's studio intact here, not for public display of course, but simply as a kind of shrine, a memorial, and in case some scholar wished to see it, some great admirer of Hamlin, well, we would make it accessible. And then of course future generations. Won't you come with me?" Smiling, turning, striding across the barbered lawn. Meaty buttocks waggle waggle waggle. Hamlin, sweating, adrenalized, following. The familiar old stone house. The squat spacious annex. A cheery wave of her hand. "There's an entrance to the studio on the far side of—" Hamlin was already on his way around there. "Oh, I see you know that." But how is it that he knows it? No indication that she suspects anything. "I'll look for Mrs. Hamlin's new name, and her address too, I suppose, and I'll meet you in a couple of minutes in the—"

Studio. Exactly as he had left it. To the left of the door, the big rectangular window. Floods of light. Facing the window, the posing dais with the microphones and scanners and sensors still in place and even his last chalk-marks still on the floor. On the right-hand wall his command console, levers and knobs and studs and dials that would surely have perplexed Rembrandt or Rubens or for that matter Leonardo da Vinci. The headphones. The ionization controller. The un-jacked connectors. The datascreen. The light-pen. The sonic generator. Such a tangle of apparatus. In back, the other little room, the annex of the annex, more things visible, coils of wire, metal struts, mounds of modeling clay, the big electropantograph, the photomultiplier, the image-intensifier, and other things which Hamlin did not seem to recognize. Hamlin wandered numbly among it all. Macy picked up his somber thoughts. The artist was frightened, even appalled, by the complexity of the studio. Trying to adjust to the idea that he had once used all this stuff by second nature. What was this thing for? And this? And this? Shit, how does it all work? I can't remember a thing.

—Rehab wrecked you, Nat, more than you realize.

*Shut your hole. I could pick all this up again in three hours.* A note of false bravado, though. Powerful currents of uncertainty coming from him. Hamlin broke off a chunk of modeling clay and began to knead it. Stiff, after all this time. The clay. And he was too. The fingers unresponsive. Let's sculpt Mrs. Bryson. Here, we roll a long tube of clay like so, and we. No. Instantly the proportions were awry. Hamlin nibbled his lip. Correcting his intuitive

beginning. She's tall, yes, and wide through the hips, and we'll need some clay here for the boobs.

—Give up, Nat, you don't have it any more.

*Piss off, Macy. What do you know?*

Yet Hamlin was unable to conceal the extent of his uneasiness from his passenger. He was fumbling with the clay, mangling it, blundering at this elementary task of modeling, straining to get the image in his mind transferred to the lump in his hands. In that tense moment Macy made new connections and for the first time gained some control over Hamlin's central nervous system. *Plink*. Strumming the neurons. Hamlin's elbow jerked. The tube of clay bent double at the sudden accidental convulsion. *Plink*. Another twitch. Hamlin shouting silently at him, now, bellowing in rage. Macy was enjoying this. He continued to tug at Hamlin's synapses while the artist trembled and shivered in mounting wrath and frustration. The half-shaped model of Mrs. Bryson a ruin. Hamlin glancing around nervously at his own equipment, so alien to him, so terrifying. Telling himself that in four, four and a half years it was possible for a person to forget all sorts of superficial mechanical things, but that you never lost the real talent, the basic underlying inborn gift, the set of perceptions and insights that is the real material to which the artist applies his learned craftsmanship.

—Go on, Nat, keep saying it, you may even start to believe it soon.

*Let me alone. Let me alone. I could learn all this machinery again in half a day!*

—Sure you could, sweetheart. Who ever doubted it?

Giving Hamlin another twong in the medulla, a blork in the autonomic, a whonk in the limbic. Yes! Really learning my way around in here, now! Just as he did in me. The shoe on the other cortex, though. I'll get him. I'll get him good. Hamlin was doing a manic dance, twitching around the room as Macy toyed with him. He couldn't seem to get himself together enough to deliver a retaliatory shot; it was as if the vibrations emanated by all the psychosculpting apparatus kept him dizzy and off balance. Keep hammering away, Macy told himself. This may be your chance to get back on top. Twong and twong and twong! Arms whipping about wildly. Knees jerking. I think I could make him crap in his undies now. A nice psychological point to score, but why shit things up for myself in case I take over? And then Hamlin began to fight back. Coldly, furiously, ramming Macy down into subservience once more. Sweeping from his mind the distractions of this dismaying studio in order to regain inner discipline. There. There. There. Macy saw that he did not yet have the power to vanquish the other, although he was constantly learning and gaining strength. Later. Another time. He has me now.

"Isn't the studio *absolutely fascinating*, Mr. Macy?"

An idiot warble, a gay contralto trill. Enter Mrs. Bryson. A slip of paper in her hand. By no accident, she has rid herself of her loincloth, and she comes jollying in, starkers, with flatfooted buoyancy. Eyes sparkling, breasts heaving expectantly. Thick curling deep-piled black triangle. Her nipples turning to turrets. The hot scent of a rutting bitch spreading in the warm air.

We're very casual about nudity out here, you see, Mr. Macy. Clothes are so primitive, don't you think! And then maybe making a quick grab for his crotch, getting the pole out in the open, down on the floor amid the paraphernalia of the great artist. To be had by his simulacrum. *Ooom*. But not this time, lady. "I had some trouble finding Mrs. Hamlin's new name and address," she said. "It was with our papers on the house, you know, tucked away, but I dug everything out, and now—"

"Yes," Hamlin said. Blurred. A frantic need to get out of here. Throat dry; face flushed; eyes unfocused. Defending himself simultaneously against Macy's assaults from within and the mockeries of this equipment from without. Her black bush and hot slot of no interest to him now. The unexpectedly overbearing atmosphere of his studio had unmanned him utterly. To escape, fast. Snatching the slip of paper from her startled hand. "Thankyou-verymuchgottogonow." Moving rapidly past her toward the door. Her face suddenly a rigid mask of surprise and anger: she knows she will be denied. Hell hath no fury. She looks ten years older. Deep lines from cheeks to chin. The nipples going soft; the shoulders slumping. All her nakedness wasted on him. Her arm outstretched, the fingers working eagerly as if to pull him back. No chance. Hamlin had reached the exit. Out into the midday brightness. Pursued by phantom tendrils of feminine libido. "You needn't leave so soon!" she calls to him. Hamlin made no reply. Glanced back once, saw her outside the studio door, naked well-endowed idle-rich lass on the threshold of middle age, bewildered by his panic, astounded by his rejection of her body.

His panic bewildered him too. Head awhirl. Macy did his best to make things worse, yanking on all the neural lines at once. Hamlin yelped, but stayed in control, and went on running. Running. Run. Ning.

In the car again, jouncing helter-skelter westward across several counties, Macy wondered if they were going to survive this trip. These back roads didn't have any protective strips, and thus the auto's homeostasis mechanisms were essentially cancelled out; if the car started to slide off the road, nothing would keep it from smashing into the bulky oaks that awaited it. And Hamlin was in a ghastly state. Madly gripping the stick. Eyes glazed in Dostoyevskian fixity. Jaws clenched. He was driving on reflex alone, employing one tiny plaque of cerebral tissue to operate the vehicle while the rest of his mind wildly revolved the events of the past half hour. The car teetered from side to side on the narrow road, now and then crossing the center line or running onto the shoulder. Most of Hamlin's defenses were relaxed, but as before Macy feared to make a takeover attempt in a moving car. He hunkered down inside Hamlin's brain as though it were a storm-shelter and temporarily disconnected his optical hookup, for the view of the madly slewing road through Hamlin's eyes was making him seasick. Better, this way. To sit in solemn silence in a dull dark dock. About him still flashed the lightnings and eruptions of Hamlin's distress. The studio visit had really shaken him. Moving among his implements, his elaborate sculpting apparatus, Hamlin had seemed not to know what from which or up from down. Macy wondered why. Had the Rehab process

done irreversible damage to the Hamlin persona? Was there actually nothing left of the original Nat Hamlin except a clutch of old memories, a cluster of attitudes and phrases, some tics and twitches of the spirit? The sculptor, the man of genius, had he been irretrievably demolished, and was this comeback merely a delusion?

On the other hand, Macy thought, it might have been the strain of maintaining control of their shared body that had so severely drained Hamlin's psychic energy. There had been definite signs all day that Hamlin's grip was none too strong and was slipping from hour to hour. In the morning, striding jauntily down the street to Gargan's gallery, presenting the contract ultimatum to the fat dealer, all that hard bargaining—Hamlin had appeared to be in full command then, but by the end of the encounter with Gargan he had started to show some fatigue, and the troubles he had had in driving from the city to his Connecticut studio had revealed a further weakening of control. And then the disastrous studio visit. Continued slippage. The battery running down and no time for recharging. It must take a constant terrific effort for Hamlin to operate this body, injured as he had been by the Rehab obliteration experts. Macy knew that he himself was nowhere near the point where he could regain the body, but the way things were going that moment couldn't be very far away. It was coming. It was coming. Or was he fooling himself?

He reconnected the visuals. The car still careening along the suburban back roads. Hamlin sitting rigidly, lost in contemplation, paying minimal atten-

tion. Horrifying. The body wouldn't be worth shit to them if Hamlin smashed up the car. Certainly fatal to both of them. But there was nothing Macy could do about that right now. He blanked the scene again, escaping. Diving down deep, burrowing into Hamlin's memory bank. Everything there was accessible to him, all the stored scenes of his prior self's active life. Failures and triumphs, mostly triumphs. The women. The critics. The press clippings. The one-man shows. The money. The accumulation of possessions. All the surface glamor. Yet beneath the shiny shallow business of career-making Macy could see in Hamlin the authentic artistic impulse, the hunger to make his visions real. Give Hamlin credit for that. He had been a bastard, sure, still was, but he pursued a vision, he realized it, he gave it to the world. There are those who make and give, and those who take and consume, and Hamlin had been a maker and giver. Macy envied that. Who are the real ones among us, anyway, if not those who create, who give, who enrich those about them? Regardless of their motives. Doing it for the money, for the ego-trip, for whatever unworthy reason, but *doing* it. Having something worth doing and doing it. Hamlin was one of those. I'm one of the consumers. Blame Gomez & Co., I guess: they could have made me someone worthwhile. Their own artistic achievement, their creative self-justification. But of course they aren't paid to do that. Just to fill up vacant bodies with reasonably functional human beings. Gomez isn't an artist, he's a doctor, and he can't transcend himself when he does a reconstruct. If I am

second-rate, it's because my makers were second-raters too. Unlike this bastard Hamlin. Whose darker side was also visible: the inner collapse, the breaking free from moorings. Roaming the quiet streets. The artist as predator. Each rape neatly labeled and catalogued in the archives. And not just mere rape, either. Not just the shoving of Blunt Object X into Unwilling Orifice Y, but also the associated stuff, the peripherals, the leering, the mocking, the capering, the perversions, the garbage. Even in a permissive age there still are such things as abominations. Hamlin must have been out of his mind. The big-eyed twelve-year-old forced to watch her pretty young blonde mother blowing the famous artist: what kind of scars does that leave on an unformed psyche? And all this buggery. A trail of torn sphincters across four states. Not even greasing it first. That's sadism, Hamlin. Out of your fucking mind. But how crazy were you, really? Didn't you have a clear conscious awareness of what was going on, and didn't you enjoy it? Yes. And wasn't all this crap latent in you all along? Yes. Okay, something brought you out. Suddenly it was Monster Time in your head, and you went forth to fulfill all the steamy dreams you had nurtured since your cramped lonely adolescence. Right? Right. And filed everything away for subsequent gloating. No wonder they sentenced you to deconstruct. Jesus, I feel filthy just rummaging through this stuff. Maker of masterpieces. Giver of unique visions. And your demonic laughter underneath. Telling the court you were insane, that you were in the grip of an irresistible impulse, an obsessive

compulsion, but were you? Perhaps you thought you were creating a new kind of work of art, made not out of paint or clay or plastic or bronze but out of bleeding invaded female bodies, an abstract sculpture composed of dozens of victims, forming a pattern you alone could have designed. Jesus. What a case for obliteration you were!

Macy noticed that the car no longer was moving. Hastily he plugged in the visuals again.

They were parked in the central shopping plaza of a medium-sized suburban city, with two and three story Westchester Tudor half-timbered shops, freshly whitewashed and their brown beams newly painted, glistening in the amber light of late afternoon. Hamlin had his head out the side door; he was asking a policeman—a *policeman!*—how to find Lotus Lane. A rapid-fire stream of instructions. Turn left at the computer stanchion, follow Colonial Avenue to Route 4480, turn right at the yellow blinker, go about ten blocks, no, twelve, you'll come to the industrial park, you turn right there past the tall building and you drive on to the sniffer palace—a grin, we've even got that stuff up here!—and make a left and that puts you on Route 519, all the cross streets there are marked, you won't miss Lotus. On the left. Thank you, officer. And off we go. Left, right, right, left. Quiet country lanes again. Hamlin tense. No difficulty following the instructions, though. Left, right, right, left, the sniffer palace, the residential area, Cypress Walk, Redbud Drive, Oak Pond Road, Lotus Lane. Lotus. Number 55. A trim stucco house twenty or thirty years old, with a perspex sundome and glossy oval opa-



quer-windows. A sign out front: THE KRAFFTS. Hamlin presented himself to the door-scanner. From within via intercom, a warm firm sweetly modulated mezzo voice: "Who is it?"

"Paul Macy."

"Paul. Macy." Doubtfully. "Paul Macy? Oh, my God! My God, you shouldn't have come here!"

"Please," Hamlin said. "Just a few minutes. To talk."

A moment of empty humming from the intercom. Then, hesitantly, "Well, I suppose. All right. Although this is probably a big mistake." Two moments more; then the door began to open. In the same instant Hamlin's left hand rose toward his throat. For the purpose, Macy sensed, of ripping the telltale Rehab badge from his clothing. Macy blocked the attempt with a fierce neural jab, the accuracy of which surprised him; Hamlin, his arm arrested in midclimb, stiffened and let the arm sag to his side, while simultaneously snapping a furious silent curse at Macy. The door was open. Framed in the vaulted entranceway stood a woman of extraordinary poise and beauty. Tall, nearly to his shoulder, but slender, fine-boned, a delicate tiny-featured face, alert ironic eyes, sleek glossy black hair in tumbling cascades, full sardonic lips, strong chin, long columnar neck. An aristocrat. He guessed her age at 31 or 32. She held herself well. "Why did you come here?" she asked.

"To see you, Noreen."

"Noreen?" The lips quirking with distaste. "Are we so intimate, then, that we use first names?"

"Formality's foolish. We were married once," Hamlin said.

"I was married to Nathaniel Hamlin, God help me." She conspicuously eyed

the Rehab badge. "Your name is Paul Macy, and I have a stack of data cubes inside containing the documents that indicate that Paul Macy is in no way an heir or assign of the former Nat Hamlin. I don't know you. I never did."

"Don't be too sure of that. Won't you ask me in?"

"My husband isn't home."

"What of it? Am I some kind of wild beast? I'm housebroken, Noreen. You can let me in."

Her invisible shrug was unmistakable. A quick grudging nod. "All right. For a few moments."

The house was small but handsomely and expensively furnished. Hamlin's gaze traveled quickly along the walls, taking in a pair of nightmarish masks from New Guinea, an African figurine, a baffling shaped painting in the form of a tesseract, and three magnificent little crystallines. Macy would have liked to linger and study the tesseract, but he was the prisoner of Hamlin's eyes, and Hamlin continued turning until he came to rest on one of his own works, an exquisite porcelain-finish image of Noreen, half life size, nude. Small high breasts, flaring waist, and, coming from the cloud of airborne speakers mounted in the dark hair: an ominously sensual viewer-responsive hundred-cycle rumble. Hamlin turned from Noreen to Noreen. "I wondered whether you'd kept it," he said.

"Why wouldn't I? It's superb." Clouds crossing her face. "You remember it?"

"I remember plenty."

"But the Rehab—"

"Let's not talk about that. Who's your new husband?"

"Sy Krafft. I don't think you knew him." Pausing. As if to run the tape

of her conversation back a bit for a correction. "I don't think *Hamlin* knew him. He does floating spectaculars. A charming and cultivated person." Pausing again. "How did you find me?"

"I went to the old house. The woman who owned it gave me your name and address."

"The Rehab Center assured me that I'd never be troubled by you."

"Am I making trouble?"

"You're here," she said. "That's enough. What is it you want with me, Mr. Macy?"

"Don't call me Macy. You know who I am."

She stepped back from him, doing it artfully, so that she seemed merely to be moving about the room and not retreating. She looked like a bird thinking of taking wing. In a low voice she said, "I never expected this. They assured me you were gone forever."

"They made a mistake."

"Rehab doesn't make mistakes. I saw your body after they burned you out of it. No, you aren't Nat. You're Macy, the new one, and you're trying to play a joke on me, and I assure you it's not in the least funny."

"I'm Nat Hamlin. His ghost walks the earth."

"You're Paul Macy."

"Hamlin."

"It can't be."

"You're so fucking beautiful, Noreen. What is it, five years, and you haven't changed at all. I get hard just standing in the same room with you. Are you making any films these days?"

"I think it's time you left."

"You still love me, don't you? I know, I know, you feel uncomfortable having me here, you're edgy and tense

because you think Mr. Sy Krafft is going to walk in on us, but you want me as much as ever. I could prove it. I could put my hand between your legs and it would come away wet. It was always easy for me to smell a woman in heat, Noreen."

"You're crazy, whoever you are. I want you to go."

"And I love you too, even more than before. Listen, don't play-act with me, don't give me that icy I-want-you-to-go crap. I'm *back*, Noreen. Don't ask me how I managed it. I'm back. I'll be going under the name of Macy, but it's me, the real me here, and I'm going to start working again soon. I've already seen Gargantua. He's signing me, he's giving me money to open a studio. Very quietly I'll reestablish myself. No rapes any more. None of that. I'll be sedate and bourgeois, Mr. Paul Macy, Mr. Nobody, only underneath it'll be Nat Hamlin. And you'll come visit me, won't you?"

"I'll visit you in jail, yes."

"You'll visit me in my studio. We'll sit and talk about how good it was before I crapped everything up. Remember, '02, '03, when we were just starting out? Lying on the beach in Antigua, and we couldn't leave each other alone, we did it right out there. Sand in your snatch, eh, Noreen? You didn't like that so much, but even so, you loved it. And then. The other times. I've got them all up here in my head. They banged me around at Rehab, but they didn't destroy me. They tried hard enough, but they didn't destroy me." He took a step toward her. Throat dry, fingertips cold. Getting harder and harder down below. "Don't be afraid of me. I love you. *I love you*. I wouldn't hurt you for anything. Stop

backing away. Listen, it'll be our secret, you and me, the world will think I'm Macy, you can go on being Mrs. Sy Krafft, this cute little house, kids—do you have kids?—whatever you want, only on the side it'll be you and me again, Nat and Noreen, at my studio. I'll do another nude of you. Life size. It'll be better than the *Antigone*. Remember how sore you were, because I used Lissa for the *Antigone* instead of you? But we were drifting apart then. I didn't know what was good for me. I had to go through hell to find out. But now. You'll pose. Shit, I can see it now. You standing over there. Those sweet little tits of yours. Ten electrodes on you. And I'm at the machine, sweating like a bastard. Getting you down, immortalizing your body and your soul. An hour for work, an hour for screwing, an hour for work, an hour for screwing. Oh, Jesus, Noreen, stop staring at me like that!"

"I'll call the police. When they catch you, Nat, they'll finish you for good. They won't even put you through Rehab. They'll chop you up and flush you away."

"No. A silver bullet in my head. A stake through the heart."

"I'll call them, Nat."

"Wait. Please, no. Look, I don't mean to frighten you. I came here to tell you how much I love you. I've been in hell, Noreen, literally in hell, and now I'm coming out, I'm going to live again. And I had to come to you. Why be afraid? Tell me you love me."

"I don't love you, Nat. You disgust me."

Hamlin began to shake.

"Brava!" he cried. "Brava! Bravis-sima!" He started to applaud. "What an actress! What fire in your reading!

What steel in your voice!" Imitating her: "*I don't love you, Nat. You disgust me.*" Wildly applauding. "Curtain. End of Act Two. Now tell me the real stuff, Noreen. How much you want me. You're scared, yes, you remember me when I was crazy, when I was doing all that hideous crap, but you've got to remember the other me, too, the one you loved, the one you married, everything we did together, the places we saw, the people, the stuff in bed, remember, even the weird stuff, you and me and Donna in the same bed, and then you and me and Alex, eh, Noreen? Love. Trust. Passion." He reached toward her. "Come on. Now. Where's the bedroom? Or right here on the floor. Let me prove it to you, that you still turn on for me. Okay? Why the hell not? You opened your gate for me five hundred times. Eight hundred. So one more won't cost you anything." He was shouting now. Her cool poise was deserting her. She looked terrified, moving away from him, stumbling over things. He lunged at her. Seizing her wrist, pulling her close. The sweet fragrance of her body mixed with fear-sweat. Her eyes glazed with fright. "Noreen," he muttered. "Noreen. Noreen. Noreen." The syllables losing meaning and becoming hollow sounds. His skull aflame. His jaws aching. His hands clutching at her clothing. Ripping. The little round breasts popping into view. Oh, Christ, how tender they are! His hands on them. Squeezing. She flailed at him with her fists, clubbing him on the mouth, the nose, the ears. He had one arm locked around her waist; the other, having laid bare her bosom, went for her crotch. To see if she was wet there. To prove to her how wrong she was to refuse him. He was

snorting. Like the old days, the bad old days. Hamlin the animal. Hamlin the horny Minotaur. Fragile woman struggling in his arms. A red haze before his eyes. Sweat running down his sides. Noreen kicking, screaming, clawing.

Now, Macy thought, and shoved with all his might. Hamlin toppled from his perch. Fell moaning into the abyss. A moment of total disorientation, infinite in duration. Who am I? What am I? Where am I? He let go of the woman he held. She slumped to the floor; he lurched backward and slammed against the wall, and stood there, gasping, exhausted. Blood draining from his skull.

But it was all right. He was in charge again. He was Paul Macy, and he was back in charge.

### THIRTEEN

TO GET AWAY from there, fast, that was the important thing now. But first some peacemaking. Gestures of reassurance. Noreen Hamlin Krafft lay looking up dazedly at him, a dribble of bright red on her swelling lower lip, hair in disarray, angry blotches on her exposed white breasts where Hamlin had clutched her. They would be dark bruises tomorrow. She didn't move. Waiting numbly for the next onslaught. Resigned to her fate. He said, his voice coming out oddly furry and unfocused, "It's okay now. I've taken control away from him. I'm Macy. I won't hurt you."

"Macy?"

"Paul Macy. The Rehab reconstruct. They did a bad deconstruct job on Hamlin and he's still loose in my head. he grabbed the body's motor and speech centers last night." Last night? Last week, last month? How long had

Hamlin been running things, anyway? "But he's down underneath again, where he can't make trouble. While he was fighting with you I was able to take over." Gently helping her to her feet. He wondered if she had gone into shock. Making no attempt to cover herself. Tip of her tongue licking at the cut on her lip. He said, "I'm sorry you had to go through all this. Are you badly injured?"

"No. No." Staring at him. Trying to come to terms with his abrupt transformation. Dr. Jekyll, Mr. Hyde. "Just shaken up." With trembling fingers she concealed her bosom, tidied her hair. Staring at him. Was his face different now? The lunatic glare of Hamlin gone from his eyes? He knew it wasn't easy for her to understand any of what had taken place. These shifts of identity: he had come to accept them as part of the human condition, but to her they must be alien, incredible, bizarre. Maybe she thought he had been Macy all along, playing insane pranks on her. Or that he was still Hamlin.

He said, "It would be best if you didn't tell anyone about this. The police, your husband, anyone. I'm trying to have Hamlin permanently eradicated before he can do some real harm, but there are problems, and getting the police into things would only make it worse for me. You see, I'm in constant danger from him, and if I went to the authorities he might force the destruction of this body, so—" He stopped. She didn't seem to be comprehending. "Just don't say anything, yes? If it's at all in my power I'll see to it you never go through a scene like this again. Do you follow me?"

She nodded distantly. Pacing about, now, working off her fright. Time for

him to go. At the front door he turned and said, "One last thing, though. Can you tell me today's date?"

"Today's date." She repeated it in a flat empty tone. As if he had asked her the name of the planet they were currently on.

"Yes, please. The date. It's important."

She shrugged. "The fourth of June, I think."

"Friday?"

"Friday, yes."

He thanked her gravely and went out. His body was stiff and he moved gracelessly toward the car, arms flailing spastically, shoulders ramming the air. He and Hamlin evidently had different notions of physical coordination, and his muscles, having taken orders from another mind for eighteen hours or so, were reluctant to go back to the mode he preferred. Not surprising: Hamlin's way was this body's normal way, and his own was something imposed from without. He concentrated on reimposing it. Damned good thing Hamlin had only been running the show since last night, since that takeover during the mugging in the hallway of Lissa's house. Macy had been afraid he might have been unconscious for a week or more before surfacing this morning. In which case he'd have an endless trail of Hamlin's deeds and misdeeds to trace and follow. But no. It seemed that he had been awake for most of the period of Hamlin's dominance, missing only the first eight hours or so after the takeover. Some comfort in that. Where had Hamlin been in those eight hours? Most likely at my place, getting some rest. And the mugging? It couldn't have been too serious. Macy patted his pocket. Wallet gone. Okay,

so he must have collapsed at the moment of takeover, the mugger cleaned him out, then Hamlin picked himself up and left unharmed. The wallet was no big loss. Identity papers, credit cards—all replaceable, all useless to the assailant. Macy didn't even need them himself, so long as he had a thumb with a fingerprint on it. Why, Hamlin had even managed to rent this car using only his thumbprint, not even his, *my* thumbprint. Ours, I guess. But the charge is debited to me. Macy felt vaguely sorry for the mugger, living a squalid lower-class life on a level of society where cash still called the tune. Fine lot of good it must have been for him to lift an executive's wallet, the wallet of a thumb-tripper, five or six dollars in it at most. Oh, well.

Moving more easily, now, Macy reached the car and thumbed the doorplate. The door slid open. He got behind the controls and tentatively grasped the steering-stick. The prospect of having to drive scared him suddenly. They had taught him how to drive at the Rehab Center, a couple of years ago, but he hadn't had much chance to practice lately; and just now there was the special risk that Hamlin might surface and screw him up on the highway. I hit him pretty hard when I grabbed control, but even so.

*Hamlin? You awake?*

No reply from the depths. Macy felt his other self's presence, though: a tinny faint reverberation out of the far-below, like the cries of an angry djinn who has been conjured back into his bottle.

*Good. Stay like that. I don't need any static from you while I'm driving.*

If only I can keep the goddamned stopper in place on the bottle this time.

He put his thumb to the ignition panel and the car, scanning the print and finding it to be that of its duly licensed present master, came to life. Warily Macy let out the brake. Cautiously he rolled forward. The car responded well, great snorting beast under harness. Which way New York, now? Long afternoon shadows. The sun halfway down on the sky on his right. Pick a direction, any direction. He found his way out of the residential area, cut off two drivers as he blurted into the business road, was rudely but deservedly screeched at, and discovered a green-on-white sign directing him to the city. Onward. Homeward. A ticklish trip. He survived it.

He hoped to find Lissa waiting for him at his apartment, slouched in bed in her pleasant wanton way, music playing, her hair a tangle, the aroma of pot in the air. Throw himself wearily down on top of her, bury his aching lead between her bouncy boobs. Some chance. The apartment, empty, deserted for a mere twenty-odd hours, had the forlorn and abandoned look of a fifth-rate catacomb. Off with the sweaty crumpled clothing. Shower. Shave. Vague thoughts of dinner. The last meal he remembered having eaten was lunch on Thursday. Now it was dinnertime on Friday. Had Hamlin bothered to refuel their body at all during his eighteen hours on top? Macy wasn't particularly hungry. All this shuttling about of identities. It must have wrecked my appetite. Odd. You'd think that much mental exertion would have burned up a lot of energy. A drink might be in order, though. He poured himself a hefty bourbon and, naked,

flopped down in a chair. A little of the liquor went sloshing out onto his thigh. Cold brown drops on the golden hairs. He felt not at all triumphant at having ousted Hamlin from control. What good was it, being in charge again? Who was he, anyway, that he needed so badly to live? An oppressive sense of having come to the end of the line grew in him. Paul Macy, born 1972 Idaho Falls, Idaho, father a propulsion engineer mother a schoolteacher, no brothers no sisters. False. False. False. I wasn't born anywhere. I am a thing out of a testtube. I am a golem, a dybbuk, a construct. Without friends, without family, without purpose. At least *he* was real. He'd fuck his kid sister, he'd steal toys from a baby, but he had an identity, a personality that he had earned by living. An artistic gift. *What about it, Hamlin? You want to have it all back? Why do I insist on getting in your way? Maybe you're right: maybe I should let you win.* Hamlin respondeth not. Only the tinny echoes, *de profundis*. He must be dormant, worn out by everything he was doing. Well, fuck him. He's no good. His soul is full of poison. Damned if I'll step aside for him, genius or no genius. The world has enough great artists. It's only got one Paul Macy, for what that's worth. This would be a good moment to go to the Rehab Center, while Hamlin's groggy. Get him carved out of me for once and all. And if he surfaces? And if he gives me that coronary he's been threatening? Fuck him. If he wants to, he can. So go ahead, coronary. So we'll both be dead. Pax vobiscum. We shall sleep the eternal sleep, he and I. Anything would be better than this. Nodding solemnly, Macy reached for the phone to call Gomez.

The phone rang with his arm still in midstretch.

Lissa, he thought. Calling to find out where I've been, asking if she can come back!

Joy. Excitement. That startled him: the intensity of his wish that it be Lissa calling. What was all this crap about dying? He wanted to live. He had someone to look after. And to look after him. They needed each other.

"Hello?" he said eagerly.

On the green screen bloomed the swarthy face of Dr. Gomez. The angel of death himself. Speak of the devil.

"I've been phoning all day," Gomez said. "Where the fuck have you been?"

"Driving around the suburbs. Weren't you supposed to be keeping me under surveillance?"

"We lost track of you."

"Is that a fact?" Macy said harshly. "Well, let me be the first to tell you, then. Hamlin got me last night and kept control until late this afternoon."

Gomez made elaborate facial gestures of exasperation. "And did what?"

"Visited his dealer, his old studio, and his former wife. Who he was in the process of raping when I got control again."

"He's still a psychopath, you mean?"

"He still gets a kick out of manhandling women, anyway."

"All right. All right. Too fucking much, Macy. Taking you over, running around the countryside. I'm having the van sent for you. Sit tight and if Hamlin makes another try at you, fight him off somehow. We'll have you safely inside the Center under sedation in an hour and a half, and then—"

"No."

"What, no?"

"Keep away from me if you want

me to go on living. I tell you, Gomez, he's a wild man. If he thinks you're seriously after him he'll shut off my heart."

"That isn't a realistic fear."

"It's realistic enough for me."

"I assure you, Macy, he wouldn't do any such thing. We've let this situation drag on too long as it is. We'll come and get you, and we'll do a proper job of deconstructing Hamlin, and I assure you—"

"Shove your assurances, Gomez. We're talking about *my survival* that's being gambled with. *My survival*. I refuse to let you have me. Where's your authority for picking me up without my consent? Where's your court order? No, Gomez. No. Keep away."

Gomez was silent a moment. A crafty look flickered into his eyes; he immediately tried to hide it, but not before Macy had picked it up. At length Gomez said in his heaviest I-know-this-will-hurt-but-it's-for-the-general-welfare manner, "You realize, Macy, that your safety isn't the only thing we have to consider here. A court has ruled that society must be protected against Nat Hamlin. The moment you notified me that Hamlin wasn't entirely gone, it became my obligation to take him into custody and carry out the court's sentence the right way. Okay, so you said you felt you were in jeopardy, you asked me to leave you alone until we worked out some sure-thing way of coping, and I let you have your way. It was against every rule, but I gave in. Out of friendship for you, Macy. Will you buy that? Out of friendship. Out of concern. And we've been trying since Monday to figure out a way of handling the situation without endangering you. But now you tell me

that Hamlin actually regained command of his body for a little while, for long enough to commit an assault against a human being. Okay. Friendship can go only so far. Can you guarantee Hamlin won't take you over again half an hour from now? Can you guarantee he won't be out banging housewives tomorrow? We *have* to scize him now, Macy, we *have* to finish him off."

"Even if it entails danger for me?"

"Even if it entails danger for you."

"I see," Macy said. "You figure, what the hell, I'm only a construct anyway and if I get wiped out, tough shit on me. The important thing is catching Hamlin. Nothing doing, doctor. I'm not going to be the innocent bystander who gets zapped while you and Hamlin shoot it out. Keep away from me."

"Macy—"

Macy hung up. Gomez' image shrank and vanished like a photo being sucked into a whirlpool. Macy gulped the last of his drink, dropped the glass, and looked around for some clothing. He understood that his conversation with Gomez had worked a significant and perilous change in his status. The Rehab man had served notice that they were going to come after Hamlin, no matter what risks were in it for anyone else who happened to be inhabiting Hamlin's body. He could wait here meekly for the van, of course. Let himself be hauled off to the Rehab Center. Taking his chances that Gomez would be able to get Hamlin before Hamlin got *him*. But how chancy a chance that was! He knew Hamlin. They hadn't shared a brain all these weeks for nothing. And he knew that if Hamlin surfaced and found himself at the

Center, being readied for a new deconstruct job, he'd explode with destructive fury. Samson pulling the pillars down around his ears. If Hamlin couldn't have the body, he'd see to it that no one would have it. So it didn't make sense to surrender to Gomez, not now. His fatalism of half an hour ago had gone from him. He didn't want to die or even to risk dying. He wasn't sure what it was he had to live for, but even so. He would have to run. He was going to have to become a fugitive.

Night had come. Everything was washed in a peculiar faded gray light. Out the side way, down the alley. Macy looked in all directions as he left the building. Feeling faintly absurd about it. This silly skulking, so melodramatic, so unreal. But what if Gomez had a man watching the main entrance? More than a touch of paranoia. They'll have hovereyes searching for me, a ten-state alarm, all the airports being watched. And where can I go? Jesus, where can I go? Macy wanted to laugh. Some fugitive. What am I going to do, camp out in Central Park? Eat squirrels and acorns?

He thought of going to the crumbling rooming-house where Lissa had lived. A double advantage to that: he might find her there, his only friend, his only ally, and in any case the place was such an armpit, such a ghastly hole, that he'd be beyond the reach of the slick computerized search-processes of the contemporary age. Hiding deep down in a rotting pre-technological subterranea. But there was one huge disadvantage, too. Gomez, knowing about Lissa, knowing that her place was where he'd be most likely to go, would certainly



set up a stakeout there. Waiting for him. Too risky. So where, then? He didn't know. He walked north. Keeping close to the darkened buildings, trying to attract no attention. One shoulder higher than the other as if he might shield his face that way. Randomly north as night closed in. Or not so randomly. He realized that his feet were taking him up Broadway, across the Bridge, into Manhattan North. Toward the only other point on his compass, the vicinity of the network office.

Landmarks of his slender tattered past. Here he had walked that uneasy hopeful Maytime day. One-and-two-and-one-and-two. Step. Step. Feeling clumsy and uncertain within his own body. Trying to be natural about it. This is how Paul Macy walks. Proudly down the goddamn street. Shoulders square. Belly sucked in. Opportunity beckons you. A second trip, a second start. The bad dream is over; now you're awake. Step. Step. Coming to an abrupt stop, he turned to his left and picked his reflection off the mirror-bright pilaster beside an office building's entrance. Wide-cheeked, thin-lipped, standard sort of Anglo-Saxon face. And the girl, coming up behind him, caught short by his sudden halt, crashing into him. Nat, she said. Nat Hamlin, for God's sake! The long cold needle slipping into his eye. Telling her politely but firmly, I'm sorry, but you're mistaken. My name's Paul Macy. People flowing smoothly around them. She was tall and slender, with long straight hair, troubled green eyes, fine features. Attractive in a tired, frayed way. Telling him not to play around with her: I know you're Nat Hamlin, she said. Leaning toward him,

fingertips clutching hard into the bones of his right wrist. A baffling sensation in the top of his skull. A sort of intrusion. A tickling. A mild glow of heat. Along with it a disturbing blurring of identity, a doubling of self. The first surfacing of Hamlin, only he hadn't known that then. Clinging to the side of the building with one hand and making a little shooing gesture at her with the other. Go on. Away. Out of my life. Whoever you were, there's no room now. And he hurried on toward the network office. Block after block, and there it was. Grim black tower. Windowless walls. He didn't go in, not now, certainly not now. Fredericks. Griswold. Loftus. My colleagues. Smith or Jones. The Hamlin over there. One of my favorites, Griswold said. A gift from my first wife, ten years back, when Hamlin was still an unknown. Coughing. If you don't mind—some cold water. Forgive me. You know, it's only my first day on the outside. The strain, the tension. No, we'll keep away from the network office tonight. And here, the corner of Broadway and 227th, northeast side. Where he met her on a Monday evening. Pacing in a taut little circle. A self-contained zone of tension on the busy street. Looking at him in mingled amazement and delight. Color stippling her cheeks. Eyes fluttering: she's scared of me, he realized. Oh, Nat, thank God you came! No, he said, let's get this established once and for all. My name's Paul Macy. What do you want? We can't talk here, she said. Not in the middle of a crowd. Where, then? Your place? He shook his head. Absolutely not. Mine, then. We can be there in fifteen minutes. But everything's filthy

she said, and he said, What about a restaurant? There's a people's restaurant two blocks from here, she said. I've been having lunch at it a lot. You know it? He didn't. We could go there, she said. Yes. I could go there again, too. Now. Now. The sudden call of hunger. Two blocks. Macy walked quickly. One shoulder higher than the other. Reaching the restaurant. A spartan socialist front, a plain glass window. Within, a deep narrow room with tarnishing brass walls and a bunch of sputtering defective light-loops threaded through the thatchwork ceiling. All right. Let's get some dinner. In here he had dinner with Lissa that night. Standing up, turning, walking away from her. And her scream. No! Come back! Paul! Paul! Nat! Her words leaping across the gulf between them like a flight of arrows. Six direct hits. St. Sebastian stumbling in the restaurant aisle. His brain on fire. And Hamlin's voice, quite distinct, from a point just above his left shoulder. —How could you walk out on her like that, you snotty creep. So here is where he first manifested himself. Very well. Let's go in.

He thought he was hungry, and loaded his tray accordingly, stacking it with meat and vegetables and rolls and more. But when he had taken a seat at one of the long tables he found he had no desire for food. He nibbled a little. He let his eyes drift out of focus and disconnected himself from reality. How restful this is. I could sit here forever. But someone was touching his shoulder. A quick impertinent prod, a withdrawal, another prod. Why can't people leave me alone? One of Gomez'

flunkies, maybe. If I pay no attention perhaps he'll go away. He tried to sink deeper into disconnection. Another prod, more insistent. A hoarse harsh voice. "You. Hey, you. Will you look at me a second? You stoned or something?" Reluctantly Macy let himself slip back into focus. A fat, stale-smelling girl in a gray dress stood beside him. Her face was as flat as a Mongol's, but her skin was pasty white, her eyes did not slant. She said, "There's a girl upstairs needs some help from you. You're the one."

"Upstairs? Girl?"

"You, yes. I know you. You were in here two, three weeks ago with that girl, that redhead, that Lisa. You're the one who collapsed, fell flat on your sniffer, we had to carry you out, me and the redhead and the cabdriver. Lisa, her name is."

"Lissa," Macy corrected, blinking.

"Lisa, Lissa, I don't know. Look, she helped you, now you help her."

A floating film of memory. Standing by the restaurant's credit console at the end of the counter that other time, authorizing it to charge his account ten dollars for his dinner. And a fat flat-faced girl waiting behind him in line snorting contemptuously. Was he paying too much? Too little? This girl.

"Where is she?" Macy asked.

"I told you. Upstairs. She came in yesterday, she was crying a lot, a big fuss. Passed out, finally. We got her a room and she's still there. Won't eat. Won't talk. You must know her, so you go look after her."

"But where? Upstairs, you said."

"The people's co-op, moron," the fat girl said. "Where else? Where else do you think?" And strode away.

**T**HE PEOPLE'S CO-OP, moron. Where else? Leaving his laden tray, he went outside and looked around. Of course: there was a hotel associated with the restaurant. Or vice versa. They shared the building. Stark green-tiled facade; a separate entrance for the hotel, escalator going up, the office on the second floor. In a wide low empty lobby, much too brightly lit, a directory screen offered sketchy information about the present residents of the building. Macy, frowning, checked the *M* column first. Moore, Lissa? Not there. He glanced at *L* and, yes, there was an entry for "Lissa," nothing else, no surname, checked in June 3, 11 PM, room 1114. There's a girl upstairs needs some help from you. And how to get upstairs? A door to his left opened and a blind man came in, moving confidently and swiftly around table and chairs and other obstacles. The sonar mounted in his headband going boing boing boing. Tan jacket, yellow pants, fleshy face, eyes half-closed showing only the whites. "Excuse me," Macy said, "can you tell me where the lift-shaft is?" The blind man, without stopping, pointed over his right shoulder and said, "Elevator's back there," and disappeared through a door to Macy's right. Macy went through the other door. Elevator. Eleventh floor. Up.

Room 1114.

No fancy communication or scanning devices here, just a plain wooden door. He knocked and got no response from within. He knocked again. "Lissa? It's me, Paul." Knock knock. Silence. As he stood there, puzzled, a girl stepped out of the room across the hall,

a thin bony girl, naked and casual about it, towel draped over one shoulder, ribs prominent, hipbones sharp, small pointed breasts. "Looking for Lissa?" she asked, and when Macy nodded the girl said, "She's in there. Go on in."

"I knocked. She didn't answer."

"No, she won't answer. Just go on in."

"The door—"

"No locks *here*, brother." The girl winked and sauntered down the hall. Her backbone standing sharply out against her skin. Pushing open another door; sound of water running, from within; the showerroom, Macy guessed. No locks here, brother. Okay. He tried the door of room 1114 and found that it was indeed open.

"Lissa?" he said.

This was what he imagined a jail cell would be like. His room at the Rehab Center had been palatial by comparison. A low narrow bed—a cot, really. A flimsy green plastic chair. A small squat brown dresser. A chipped yellow-white washstand. A grimy sliver of window. Bare flooring; cruel naked lights. Lissa was naked too, slouched on the bed, knees up, arms locked across them. She looked gaunt, almost frail, as if she had dropped eight or ten pounds in the thirty-six hours since he last had seen her. Her hair was a knotted mess and her eyes were red and raw. The room reeked of sweat. Her clothes lay in a heap near the window; the closet, its door ajar, was empty; near the washstand stood the big dilapidated green suitcase that she had used in bringing her things from her apartment to his, and from his place to here. Its sides bulged: she hadn't bothered to unpack. As he en-

tered, her head moved slowly in his direction, and she looked at him and did not look. And her head moved back so that she stared again at the brown dresser. Macy walked past the foot of the bed and tried to open the window, but there was no way of doing it. He spoke her name again; she gave no sign of hearing him. Crouching beside her, he took one of her feet in his hand, lifted it six inches, watched it drop heavily back, and slid the hand upward to the meaty part of her calf. Her skin blazed. Fever was consuming her. His hand went to her thigh. His fingertips dug in high, just below the curling auburn thatch, but she took no notice. He shook her thigh. Nothing. He stroked her breasts, he cupped one. Nothing. He rubbed the tip of his thumb back and forth over the nipple. Zero. He fanned his fingers in front of her eyes. She blinked once, absently. "Lissa?" he said a third time. She was gone, lost, cocooned in introspection. Beyond his reach. Anyone could do anything to her now and probably she wouldn't react. How to break through? No way. No way.

He stood by the window with his back to her.

A long time later she said, voice thin and distant, "The talking in my head was driving me crazy. Bouncing off the walls. I couldn't stay."

He swung around to face her. She was wholly expressionless. Still staring at the dresser. Her words might have been those of a ventriloquist. "You didn't need to run away," he said. "I was trying to help you."

"You had no help to give. And I couldn't help you either. We were destroying each other."

"No."

"I opened you to Hamlin."

"It doesn't matter. We needed each other."

"I needed to go," she said. "I was choking there, I had to get out. So I went. So I came here."

"Why?"

"To hide. To rest." Murmured words, windsounds. "Go away, now. I have the voices again. The pressure building up. Can't you feel it? The pressure. The pressure building up."

He caught her hand in his. The fever raging. The muscles of her arm entirely limp. Like holding a length of rope. "You're ill, Lissa, physically ill. Let me get a doctor for you." He wasn't sure she heard him. Floating away from him again. "I'll call a doctor," he said. "All right." Her eyes like glass spheres. She was adrift, heading out on the tide. He shook her, he fondled her, he talked to her. Zero. Talked *at* her. An urgent torrent. Flooding her with words, trying to talk her back into some sort of contact with him. Come on, snap out of it. Telling her of love, of need, of second starts, of new tomorrows, of shared anguishes, of an end to self-pity and vulnerability. Anything. Inspirational words. The old sunny platitudes. Why not tell her such things? To reach her. We'll go far away and try again, you and me, me and you. A whole world of happiness. Come, Lissa. Come. Knowing that he is losing her, moment by moment. Has lost her. A million million miles away on her planetoid of ice. Yet he continued. Striving to pour his frantic energy into her, to fill her with enough stamina to return and rise. Visions of hope, daydreams of health and joy. A shimmering rainbow curving across the room from door to window. On and

on and on, his voice growing rasping and edgy and desperate, Lissa paying no attention; the ice now entombed her, she could only dimly be seen within the sparkling wall of the glacier. He was tiring. Why go on? She didn't want to hear this. He became angry with her, hostile, irritated, begrudging her the resources of strength she was draining from him. And for what, this tremendous effort of his? What good? Everything he gave her the fever ate. She was the conduit through which his energies rushed uselessly into a shoreless sea. Now there was loud in him the voice of temptation, telling him to leave her while he still could, to forget her, to make his own difficult way through the world without dragging her on his back. You owe her nothing. You have troubles of your own, many of them caused by her. Why this quixotic desire to rescue and repair her? Let her sink. Let her fry. Let her freeze. Let her stew. Go. She told you to go: therefore go. This shabby burned-out girl with her implausible affliction, her ESP. Her chattering angry voices. The necklace of grime on her chest. Vacant glassy eyes. Go. To this Macy answered, not releasing Lissa's sweating palm, that he would hear no counsel of defeat, nor would he abandon her now. He went on urging her to come out of her trance; he pleaded with her not to give up. Here I am: take strength from me. Let me be your shield and your support. He conceived the notion of hauling her from the bed and carrying her out of the room, to that shower in the hall, where he would let the cool cleansing water sluice her from her lethargy. He naked beside her as the purifying deluge descended. Up, then. To the shower. Grunting, he seized her

by the shoulders, but her body was a dead weight and there was suddenly a terrific fiery bolus in his chest and a band of hot steel across his forehead, and he realized that she had already drained too much from him, that he was no longer strong enough to lift her. He let her fall back and collapsed across her, panting. His eyes were wet, he knew not whether from pain or despair or frustration or rage. Saving her was beyond him. He was too weak. He was too weary. He was too empty. He had given all he could give, and it had not been enough, and now he could give no more. Perhaps if I rest. Perhaps in a little while. But he knew he was being foolish. He was drained. He would not soon recover. And now, too, he knew who it was who had tempted him to turn back before reaching this point, for he felt the presence hot within him, rising, expanding, glowing, the dark presence of his other self coming forth from his hidden lair, whispering wordlessly to him, crooning, inviting him to yield. Shall I fight him? *Can I fight him?* I must. I must. Macy readied himself to resist. Searching the corridors of his soul for forgotten reservoirs of strength. But he feared it was too late, that the takeover was already beginning. Already he felt a familiar sensation, a prickling at the back of his neck, a tingling, a mild stiffening of the skin. The unseen fingers were at work, stroking the lobes of his brain, caressing the prominences and corrugations. Inviting him to yield. Yes. Yes. Temptation. An end to turmoil and torment. No, Macy said, I will not let you have me. He attempted to get to his feet, but the best he could manage was to roll heavily free of Lissa and lie beside her. She seemed to be

unconscious. A sleep beyond all dreams. How peaceful she looks. And I could sleep that sleep. Come, said the voiceless voice in wordless words, let me enfold you, let me supplant you. Let there no longer be struggle between us. Give way to me. *No! You will not have me!* And Macy reached out toward Lissa, seeking her, asking alliance. The two of us against him. We can strike at him, we can destroy him. Lissa was a million million miles away. Her planetoid of ice. The cold light of the distant sun dancing on the walls of the glacier. The tempter said, You see, there is no help to be had from her. Now is the time. Step aside for me. Be realistic, Macy, be realistic! Macy attempted to be realistic. Where shall I go? How shall I fight? Who shall I be? And saw how little hope there was. He could not save himself. He had not been designed for this sort of stress. They had sent him on this second trip laden with an impossible burden, and was it then any surprise that the trip was a bummer? Let us end it. Let us fight no more. He would rest, he would close himself to struggling and hoping, he would surrender. The odds were too high against him. Outside waited Gomez, the van, the long cold needles, the drugs, all the machinery of deconstruction. Inside lurked Hamlin. Beside him lay this shattered girl. All right. I yield. I will fight no more.

—Then get out of the way, Hamlin said, and let me become you.

The mixing of selves was beginning. The dissolving, the blending. Paul Hamlin. Nat Macy. I am he. He is I. Maelstrom. Blinded by churning debris raining upon them out of their entangled pasts. A holocaust of dislocated events. As we dissolve into one another.

Jeanie Grossman beneath the snows of Mount Rainier. And the girl with the long straight silken golden hair. Look, all through history girls have been posing for famous artists. Let me show you these charts, ma'am, explaining the special advantages of our encyclopedia. Why should you go to art school? My boy, you are already a master! Members of the class of '93, welcome to the UCLA campus. Hey, no, officer! Put that stunner down! I surrender, damn you, I surrender! I'll go peacefully! It isn't a matter of opinion, it's a matter of voltage thresholds. A voltage doesn't lie. Amperes don't have opinions. Resistances don't fuck around with you for sly tactical reasons. We're dealing in objective facts, and the objective facts tell me that Nat Hamlin has been wiped out. One-and-two-and-*one*-and two. Proudly down the goddamn street. Your new career. Your new life. *Shqkm. Vtpkp. Smss! Grgg!* Will the defendant please rise. Nathaniel James Hamlin you have heard the verdict of your peers. Don't play around with me. I know you're Nat Hamlin. You're looking good, Nat. *The Torments of Fame. The Day the Museum Bought Everything. My Name is Lissa.* No! Come back! Paul! Paul! *Nat!* Paul Hamlin. Nat Macy. We are becoming one. We are dissolving each into each. I will be you and you will be nothing. And there will be peace at last.

Lissa! *LISSA!*

Abruptly the sky darkened and without warning bolts of lightning flashed and terrible thunder came and a sword swept down, trailing streamers of fire, to cleave the hemispheres of

(Continued on page 106)



# The LIVING MIST

By RALPH MILNE FARLEY

FAMOUS AMAZING CLASSIC

**Warden Lawson had a strange power over the convicts of his prison, but Spike Torri was a different proposition. Then came the Mist—a mist that was *living*! And the life in it was that of Spike Torri!**

WARDEN LAWSON sent for "Spike" Torri around three that afternoon. This was another break for me, because the *Boston Times* had sent me down for a Sunday feature and I had run smack into a pair of fair-sized riots. I plastered my eye against the peek-hole in the adjoining room and got ready.

Torri came in a moment later. Slim, dapper even in prison grays, he walked over to stand in front of the warden's big walnut desk.

"What the hell is this?" Lawson barked. "You're not going to make a monkey out of me! Ten years you get for a bank job. So you put on an act when you get here, promise to reform, and like a horse's neck I make you a trusty a year ago. So today we have two riots—count 'em, two!—one in the dining hall, the other in the yard, and you refuse to spill the beans. Louse!"

Torri had been white-faced when he came in. Now the color came back to his cheeks, although his poise had been perfect all through. He rubbed his chin reflectively, grinned—the guy had charm, I'll admit that—and then spread out his hands.

"Warden," he said, "I thought it was about something serious. Like maybe

you thought I was the skunk in the woodpile. Now, Warden, you wouldn't want me to be a stool pigeon, would you?"

"Yes," Lawson snapped, "I would! I'm running a prison, not a finishing school. If we don't get to the bottom of this, there'll be more trouble and some guys will get shot. You wouldn't want that to happen, would you?" Lawson pleaded.

Torri shrugged disarmingly. "Just between you and me, Warden," he said, "would that be much of a loss to the world?"

Touché! Lawson sprang up, fists clenched. Torri stood his ground, sure of himself, amused, knowing he was in the clear.

"Get out of my office!" the warden snarled. "Play games with me, huh?"

He advanced threateningly. Torri, half the size of the huge prison official, backed tactfully to the door and felt for the knob.

"By the way, Warden," Torri said as he got the door open, "I'm getting paroled in a month, you know. Going to work in my Dad's wholesale meat business. And," he added softly, "your daughter promised to marry me when I drove her to town yesterday."



"What!" Lawson got apoplectic. "How dare you say such a thing! Why, you're only a jailbird! A cheap common punk that I took pity on! So that's the way you repay me—ingrate!" Lawson balled his big fists. "Get back to your hole!" he thundered. "Yes, you—Number Six-eight-seven-three-five! And your privileges are revoked!"

If Torri had been a man, he would have planted his feet on the floor and talked back. Maybe that was what Lawson had hoped for. This, after all, was the crucial test. But Torri couldn't measure up to it. His cool agate eyes fell to the floor. His cheek muscles twitched spasmodically. He—cringed.

"Yes, sir," said Spike Torri meekly, and backed out the door.

I came in the room a moment later. Lawson was mopping his brow.

"Boy, that was a close one!" he breathed. "If that fellow had taken a poke at me he could have had Margery and my best wishes. But I knew the guy had a yellow streak in him—I was just hoping to make a man of him in other ways. Well, live and learn."

"You're," I said, "telling me!"

Lawson relaxed. "You're okay, son. Come on, I'll take you on a tour through the place myself. Then we'll have supper together. Help to round out your article—I'm just a family man at heart, and all that stuff. There'll be just Margery, Dr. Avery, and you and me."

I was glad the invitation came from him. If Warden Lamont Lawson, head of the State Penitentiary, had a daughter who gallivanted around with a prison trusty—hell, I wanted to meet the girl and see what made her tick. I had already met Avery—a frank, broad-shouldered young fellow just out of his internship.

The trip through the prison was interesting enough. Lawson had installed

an efficient organization and it worked like a clock. The print shop, mill and foundry ran much like their counterparts on the outside, and the prisoners seemed to have an unusual amount of freedom. The riots, Lawson explained to me, were the result of overcrowding and an insufficient appropriation for food.

"We do the best with the funds at our disposal," he said. "If the people stand for slums and unemployment, we're going to have crime. I'm the fellow that's got to take it in the neck, when that happens. Society's chickens all come home to roost—right here!"

SUPPER that evening was a restrained affair. Lawson and I couldn't help thinking of the two riots—and Spike Torri. Young Dr. Avery was naturally diffident, evidently more so than usual tonight. He stared steadily at Margery Lawson with a sort of hurt, appealing look in his eyes.

Well, I couldn't blame him any—not for looking. Margery, in the popular parlance, was an eye-ful. Clear-cut, almost cameolike features, burnished copper hair, and dark blue eyes which seemed troubled, though she said little. When she did speak, she ignored Avery completely. Trying to size her up, I could not for the life of me understand how this girl had fallen for a shallow punk like Torri. Sure, he'd fooled the warden. But you can't fool a woman, brother—they've got intuition!

After the dessert, Margery got up, saying she had a headache, and withdrew to her room with almost tactless haste. Lawson, Avery and I lit our cigars, and Lawson turned on the radio to a dance program.

After a bit: "Margery's a strange child," the warden began awkwardly.

Young Avery's sensitive face twitched. "She is just a child," he

mumbled. "Maybe that's the reason."

I, of course, kept my mouth shut. My ears, too—officially. My article in the *Boston Times* would be concerned strictly with my prison tour. A good newspaperman, after all, prints news—not gossip. What the public doesn't know will never hurt it. Besides—

The dance band abruptly blacked out. We all sat up, tensing. Maybe Hitler had just taken over Greece—

"Flash! Your local newscaster, Benny Bartlett, has just learned that Spike Torri, notorious bank robber, escaped from the State Penitentiary tonight! The eight p. m. checkup revealed Torri missing from his cell. The cell-block is closed by double-doors, and both sets of locks are intact. So is the lock on Torri's own cell!

"Folks, I've got it exclusively that Torri's cellmate claims to have been asleep and to have heard nothing! According to Deputy Warden Herman Wagner—"

Lawson jerked to his feet and switched off the radio.

"That damned local station!" he growled. He grabbed up the French phone from its stand and barked:

"Central 7997! Emergency! Yeah, this is Warden Lawson. . . . Wagner? What the hell is going on? Why did you give out that story? How do you know Torri isn't hiding in the place somewhere? . . . *What!* You *didn't* give it out? You . . . Huh? You called here and my phone didn't answer? Why man, you're crazy—I've been here all evening!"

Avery and I stared at each other.

"Now get this," Lawson barked. "Phone that fool radio station, tell them you found Torri hiding in the prison laundry. . . . Yeah, that's right. Then send a squad out with the bloodhounds. I'll meet you at the 'hollow'—that's where he'll be heading."

Lawson slammed the receiver down and slumped into a chair. His face seemed to have gone pale, and his eyes had a staring look about them.

"Something's screwy around here," he muttered. "Sherman, I've been holding out on you. Funny things have been going on around here lately, but I just couldn't place my finger on what's wrong."

That's me Roy Sherman. "You mean," I said, "something uncanny—"

Lawson got up heavily and put a hand on my shoulder.

"Son," he said, "you came down here for a story. Well, I'm afraid that's just what you're going to get."

## CHAPTER II

### The Monster Rises

THE three of us emerged into the sweet-scented summer moonlight. A cooling breeze swept in from Cape Cod, a mile away. A manhunt on such a night seemed incongruous. One of the prison guards, running up, met us on the sidewalk.

"The dogs are headed for Richard's Woods, sir," he panted.

Lawson motioned to Avery and me to get into his car, which was parked at the curb, and soon we were speeding over the two-lane highway.

We flushed another guard at the outskirts of the woods, halted.

"The hounds are in there, sir," he reported. "Near the—the—"

He glanced inquiringly in my direction. Lawson nodded his shaggy head.

The man continued, "They're near the 'hollow', Warden." His voice was tinged with awe.

The night seemed suddenly not quite so warm and balmy as we drove on.

"I don't hear any baying," I remarked, with an attempt at calmness.

"Avery cut their vocal cords. Baying would give the chase away. Silent hounds are more terrifying to the pursued," Lawson said.

A cloud passed across the face of the moon, and I shuddered. Black night, heavy thickets shrouding the gaping mist-filled maw of the "hollow," which was a swamplike depression in the woods, and a pack of silent bloodhounds relentless on the trail of a fugitive from justice—I shuddered again.

Lawson stopped the car moments later. About half a dozen guards had gathered, with their electric torches, carbines and sawed-off shotguns. One guard held two straining hounds in leash.

Deputy Warden Wagner lumbered up to report. "The dogs have traced him into that thicket, just as you expected. We then circled it, but there is no trail out. He must be still in there."

"Good!" Lawson snapped. "But keep dogs and men out until daylight. Might fall into the 'hollow' in the dark. Surround the place until morning."

Dr. Avery stayed on, but Warden Lawson and I drove back to town. Before turning in at my hotel, I wired my paper about Torri's escape and told them I was on the track of further news which was about to break. The writing of the prison feature could wait—it was a Sunday article, anyway.

Shortly before daybreak, the warden called for me and drove me out to Richard's Woods again. As soon as it was fully light, we plunged into the thicket from all sides, alert and armed. The bloodhounds led the way straight to the rim of the hollow, where they recoiled with evident terror. I didn't feel much better myself at what I saw.

There was a saffron mist at the bottom of this pit within the hollow. It seemed to be seething with strange activity. Even as we peered down, *the*

*saffron mist gathered itself into a stringy ball and floated upward!*

As the tenuous mass reached the level of the ground, from its evil midst a tentacle suddenly lanced out at Dr. Avery. He threw up his hands before his face, staggered backward from the hollow, tripped and fell. One of the hounds sprang forward protectingly, only to receive the tentacle like a whiplash square across its muzzle.

The next moment the poor animal was writhing on the ground and pawing at the wound—or burn, rather, like that of a branding iron. Avery picked himself up, deftly tied a handkerchief across the dog's muzzle, pinioned its legs with its leash, and—assisted by one of the guards—carried it out gently to the car. There could be no doubt that the dog had been seriously burned.

Meanwhile the nauseous orange-yellow cloud had drifted up, over the tops of the trees, and away out of our sight. The bottom of the hollow now lay exposed to view for the first time, Lawson told me in an aside.

"For the first time?" I asked him. "What is this, a sulphur deposit? Funny that no one seems to have heard anything about it, until now."

"Not at all," Lawson contradicted. "The town here, you know, is quite a summer resort. The prison is far enough on the outskirts not to cause an unpleasant atmosphere. But this hollow here—well, the local people keep quiet about it, so that it won't get into the newspapers. Be bad for the tourist trade, you know. Especially since the prison is located here, too."

WE crowded to the edge of the pit then and peered over its steep sides. The depression was much deeper than we had thought, and in its bottom were tightly packed the yellowed bones of thousands of small birds and

animals. And—lying atop this pile was the skeleton of a man, contorted as though its owner had died in agony; a skeleton literally picked clean of flesh.

"Spike Torri!" Lawson remarked grimly with a sweep of his hand. "He tried his luck just once too often."

Several of the guards, religious fellows, nervously crossed themselves.

No one cared to risk crawling down into the hole to fetch this grisly relic, so ropes and grappling hooks were brought, and the bones were hoisted out.

From Bertillon measurements and the records of the prison dentist, it was unquestionably identified as the last *physical* remains of Spike Torri.

Later, Warden Lawson gave out a statement to the press that Spike Torri had been drowned in a pond in the woods, and that the reason for the earlier official false announcement of Torri's capture was to allay popular fear of a criminal at large. My own account, wired exclusively to the *Boston Times*, was more complete, but it did not mention the hollow and its legend.

Of course, the part about the hollow did eventually leak out in and around the town, and scores of inquisitive persons visited the spot. But by that time the abortive escape of Spike Torri had ceased to be news, and if anything much about the hollow got into the papers I didn't notice it.

Margery Lawson shut herself up in her room, and refused to see anyone, even Dr. Avery. And the young prison physician respected her grief, though he could not respect the cause of it. For it was only too obvious that the girl had fallen for this sleek ex-gangster.

Some subconscious hunch held me in town. I wrote up my Sunday feature article and mailed it in to the *Times*. Yet still I lingered. And, to kill time,

I read all the local news.

And all at once I began to notice scattered items about the loss of cows and horses and other stock at various points throughout the county. Always the skeleton would be found, picked clean of flesh. The losses usually occurred at night.

Finally these items came to the attention of others than myself. Wolves were suspected, although none had been seen in this vicinity for a generation. I hired a car and toured the countryside, interviewed farmers (some of whom claimed to have actually seen the wolves), and wrote up a cracker-jack of a yarn about it all for my paper.

But Warden Lawson, Dr. Paul Avery and I had our own theory.

One evening when I was visiting at the warden's house, the phone rang. Lawson answered it. I paid no particular attention, until I noticed that he was frantically juggling the center of the phone-rest with one forefinger.

"Operator! Operator!" he barked. "I've been disconnected. Who was calling? All right, ring them back, please. They don't answer? That's strange. Well, keep trying them, and call me."

He replaced the phone in its cradle, then turned toward Avery and me, a strained expression on his face.

"That was Deputy Wagner's voice. He said 'Hello.' Then there was a choking gurgle, and the line went dead. I'm going over across to the prison. Something's wrong."

THE three of us hurried with him across the street. We rang and rang the doorbell at the main entrance, but no one came. We walked around under the wall and shouted up at several of the sentry boxes, but received no response. There were lights in the main office on the second floor, where Deputy Wagner should have been. We

threw stones up against the lighted windows, but without rousing anyone.

Lawson charged back into his own house like a man gone berserk, dialed the headquarters of the local police and the captain of the local National Guard company.

"Jail break!" he snapped. "Rush all available men to the State Penitentiary, and surround the place!"

We had scarcely returned to the street again, when the screaming of motorcycle sirens signaled the arrival of the first detachment of police. These took up positions at strategic points around the gray stone buildings. A half hour later a sleepy company of national guardsmen trotted up. Machine guns were set up opposite the principal exits. Yet still not a sound came from within the prison, to indicate what the mutinous inmates were up to.

Equipped with a powerful long-focus electric flash, Warden Lawson began a tour around the walls.

"You two better keep under cover," he cautioned Avery and me. "The cons are probably armed."

"How about yourself?" I replied.

He laughed harshly. "Wouldn't dare pot *me*." It was the only time I ever heard him boast of his strange power over his charges.

Anyway Avery and I went with him. He trained his beam on the top of the wall and swept it along. It came to a stop on something white. We craned our necks and peered up through the darkness.

The white object was a human skeleton lying atop the wall, with one bony arm trailing down over the edge.

"We might have known," Avery breathed.

Sledgehammers were brought, and two husky policemen battered down the main door. Then, preceded by a squad of soldiers with automatic rifles

and pistols alert, we entered the prison. Not a single living soul greeted or opposed us.

In the main office sat another human skeleton, slumped over the desk, with one bony hand resting on the cradle-telephone. Every shred of flesh and clothing was gone, except on the head. The head was intact. Dr. Avery lifted it up, and the agonized fat face of Deputy Herman Wagner stared at us, pop-eyed, its jaw fallen open and frozen in that position.

A gasp of horror rose in unison. Then we all raced through the building, searching for what we knew instinctively we would find.

On the bare wires of the bunks in the guards' squad-room lay the skeletons of the day shift—with heads intact.

"Whoever did this was kind enough to leave identification easy," the captain of the soldiers commented grimly.

"Don't!" groaned the warden. "Each of these men was an old friend of mine."

At the entrance to the cell-block we found two seated skeletons. Heads intact, of course. But when we came to the cells, there was a difference; for, in the case of all the prisoners, the skulls too had been picked clean.

Sickened to our souls, we turned away. Warden Lawson, walking like a man in a dream, his eyes distant and vacant, extinguished all the lights, locked all the inside doors, and requisitioned a squad of soldiers to guard the battered entrance until morning.

Paul Avery edged up to me, his normally luminous brown eyes now slits, and whispered,

"The mist has fed well this night."

His words snapped me out of my horrified daze. Bidding the distracted warden a "good evening" which he scarcely noticed, I raced back to my hotel and phoned my city editor the scoop of the year.

I HAD just hung up, when the operator rang me back.

"Paul Avery speaking. Come over as quickly as you can. Mr. Lawson is taking this situation too hard, and Margery and I can't handle him."

I hopped a taxi and sped to the warden's home. Margery and Dr. Avery, with solemn faces and fingers entwined, met me at the door and ushered me into the den.

There sat Margery's father, his big body slumped in a chair, his bushy mane of hair rumpled, his leonine head in his strong hands.

"It's all my fault," he kept moaning in a monotone. "All my fault."

And nothing that the three of us said could snap him out of his stupor of remorse.

### CHAPTER III

#### Abortive Attack

THE next few days were hectic ones for me. The inquest at the prison was front-page stuff. Staff writers from all the leading dailies in the country flew in, but I still maintained the inside news track.

The town was jammed with curiosity-seekers, who even dared to invade the depths of the hollow and cart away its grisly contents, bone by bone. Hawkers appeared on the streets, selling miniature skeletons and little bottles filled with orange-yellow gas. It was the Lindbergh kidnap trial all over again, and worse.

Through it all Warden Lawson moved like a sleep-walker, but whether stunned into mental numbness or lost in unfathomable thoughts, we three who watched over him were unable to determine.

Together so constantly, Margery and Paul Avery became very close

friends. They became so close, in fact, that one afternoon they slipped down to the church rectory and were married quietly by the minister.

Quiet, too, was the mist. The orange-yellow menace had not been sighted since its violent and all-embracing attack on the prison.

"It's sleeping off its orgy in some hideout," Avery suggested somberly. "This thing is a horrible monstrosity, and I wish the public would realize it and do something about it."

That was the strange part of it all. First news of the prison outrage had created a sensation. "The mist" had been played up in 96-point headlines. And then editors had begun to get cynical.

"Such a monster is beyond the realm of possibility," they snorted. "What probably happened is that the ventilation system, which runs through the prison's chemical laboratory, became choked with a powerful gas which eats away flesh and then dissipates itself in the air. Probably some convict was experimenting with a highly volatile form of mustard gas, and something went wrong."

I made my own investigation. I checked over every chemical in the place. I examined the records of chemicals bought for the past year by the prison's purchasing officer.

*And there were insufficient chemicals, or combinations of them, to have compounded such wholesale death!*

Being a newspaperman, I kept my discoveries to myself. Now was not the proper time to go off half-cocked on a wild-eyed tangent. I would have to wait and let things take their course. Of that much I was certain—the mist, whenever it was ready, would strike again.

Meanwhile, a meeting of minds could be of no harm. Margery, Paul Avery

and I had numerous discussions on the nature of the mist. Leading scientists throughout the world wrote glib articles explaining the phenomenon as one sort of caustic gas or another; but somehow their explanations didn't sound very convincing.

For one thing, they all ducked what seemed to me to be the most significant fact of all, namely, that the heads of *all* the prisoners had been left fleshless, while the guards had kept their skulls intact. I felt that this was somehow the key to the whole morbid puzzle. Obviously the mist did things by calculation; obviously there was diabolical method in its madness. . . .

Gradually the furor died down. Warden Lawson ceased to be a personality of news interest. Indeed, he ceased to have any individuality at all. He simply sat through the days with head bowed in his hands, as in a constant daze.

The newspapers had forgotten all about the affair at the State Penitentiary when the mist struck again. One morning a badly frightened farmer living on the outskirts of town phoned in to report that the whole of the adjoining farm was blotted out by yellow fog.

I WAS now representing a chain of papers, in addition to the Boston *Times*. I hastened to the scene by taxi, snapped shot after shot of the huge gaseous amoeba, and sent the films off by twin carrier pigeons. Our cameras take all pictures in duplicate, and it was well this time that they did. For as my two birds circled up after being released from their cage, a yellow tentacle lanced out, flicked one of them and dragged it back fluttering into the writhing mist. The other pigeon, with a terrified upsurge, escaped.

Shortly thereafter, crowds of morbid sightseers began to arrive. But

now the holiday spirit, which had been evident during the inquest, was markedly absent. The present onlookers were intent and grim.

A stiff wind was blowing toward the mist from one side, but that did not seem to affect it other than to ruffle its pulsating surface. Someone suggested fighting it with fire, and instantly the crowd went determinedly to work piling up hay and fence rails along the boundary. Soon hot tongues of fire were lapping out at the tendrils of yellow mist.

The mist cringed back at the contact, and the throng let out a yell of triumph. The mist gave way, retreated, then surged aloft in a compact saffron ball, clear of the flames, to reveal for the first time the condition of the farm which it had invaded.

With the exception of *one small shed, surmounted by a radio aerial*—radio had been Farmer Johnson's hobby—not a building remained standing. There was not a tree, shrub, plant or even a blade of grass left on the entire farm. Alongside what had once been the barn, there lay now the bleached skeletons of two cows.

I got some excellent pictures, and released two more pigeons.

When the borderline fires died down, the ball of yellow fog descended again. Once more it spread out over the entire farm, licking out misty tentacles at the crowd until the people stampeded back to a safe distance. Then the mist relapsed into quiescence.

Later in the day, so I learned, the village fire department, called to extinguish a grass fire which had spread with a change in the wind, tried squirting both water and chemicals at the mist, but without any evident result.

That evening at the Lawsons', during a lull in the conversation, I was idly twiddling the dials of the radio set

when the following message suddenly blared forth. I can give it verbatim, inasmuch as it was later reprinted in all the newspapers.

We, the Mist, address the people of this State. We wish to live at peace with you. Do not attack us again with fire. Not that fire can hurt us, for you have seen that it cannot. But attacks on us irritate our patience. Do not try it again.

As we said, we wish to live at peace with the world. Feed us two fat steers per day, and we will remain within the confines of the Johnson farm. Refuse us this very reasonable request, and we shall go on a rampage.

No telling then where we shall strike. No citizen will be safe. You have already seen an example of our power in our raid on the State Penitentiary. We await an official reply on our own wave-length: fifteen-point-three.

**SILENCE** then. A creepy feeling ran down my spine.

"What the hell is this?" I muttered. "I don't get it. I don't get it at all."

Margery said, "I don't see how it could use the radio."

That's what got me sweating. "I've heard of screwy things, but never of a mist making up to a microphone."

Avery pursed his lips and said, "I think I've heard that voice before."

An expression of reminiscence and of pain flashed across Margery's face. Her jaw set and her blue eyes narrowed.

"That was Spike Torri's voice," she said. "I could never forget it."

"But Torri is dead!" I exclaimed. "The Mist got him." (I didn't realize it then, but the Thing had assumed the proportions of a monster from that point on in my mind. It was a living Thing now—the Mist.)

Paul Avery looked at me. "I wonder," he said. "I wonder if he is dead."

That brought Warden Lawson out of his daze. The whole of his face lighted

up, and his bushy black brows twitched. He tensed his lips, snapped his fingers several times, nodded his head *contentedly*—and then lapsed back into quiescence.

All that evening we hung by the radio, waiting for an official reply from the State capital. But Governor Maverick, a shrewd politician, merely called in the press and issued a statement that he had begun an immediate investigation. He would, he said, have some definite news within twenty-four hours.

That gave me an idea. I phoned the State House and got the Governor's assistant secretary on the wire. He and I had been roommates at college.

"Joe," I said, "what's the payoff?"

His voice got very low. "For cripes' sake, don't let it get out that this came from me. Phone Professor Mordecai Miller at Harvard—you know, the world's leading authority on chemical poison. Tell him that you figure he's been called into the case—because who else would know what to do? So naturally he'll say 'yes,' that the Governor just got in touch with him."

"Thanks, pal," I said. "Call this number"—I gave him the listing—"if anything else breaks, huh? I won't be here, but leave word for me to call back."

So I phoned Professor Miller and got him just as he was about to leave on a chartered plane.

"Naturally I have been summoned by the Governor," he snapped. "Who else would be called in?"

Didn't like himself much, did he? I got my paper three minutes later. We broke the news of Miller's imminent arrival hours ahead of any other sheet in the country.

Next morning I went out to the Johnson farm. Miller had been there for a couple hours and had been working since before dawn, supervising the as-



sembling of several trunkloads of laboratory apparatus. Although it was seven o'clock, a huge crowd had already gathered. Paul Avery had come with me, but he had insisted that Margery remain at home.

The local militia company was there, too, with a lot of peculiar-looking gadgets like fire extinguishers. And a dozen or more oil trucks.

Avery and I introduced ourselves to Professor Miller, a tall, lean, scholarly gentleman with a brown Vandyke beard and an expression of intense intolerance.

Avery started to tell him that the Mist was a living creature, possessed of a high degree of intelligence, and to be fought as such. But the Professor brushed him impatiently aside with a contemptuous, "What degrees do you hold, Dr. Avery?" and continued about his business.

**OIL** from the trucks was sprayed into the Mist from all sides. The Mist merely parted to let the streams through, then closed again like a trap when the streams petered out. Professor Miller's white teeth grinned with satisfaction through his brown beard.

The troops, with their engines of war at equal intervals, now surrounded the Johnson farm. Three shots from a revolver by their captain was the signal for them to get into action. Scores of flames belched in unison from their flame-throwers.

With a mighty hiss, the Mist recoiled inwardly from all sides. And the fuel oil, previously sprayed in and now uncovered, blazed up with a roar. The Mist had been trapped, taken by surprise. It contracted into a compact orange-colored ball in the very center of the farm, as the fire surged toward it.

Then with an upcurving wave along its entire periphery, the Mist sprang

outward in all directions. A saffron tidal wave, it came. It blanketed the flames. Angry tentacles, like flames themselves, lanced out at the surrounding crowd, which scattered stumblingly with shrieks of terror.

When it was all over, and the Mist had withdrawn again to the proper confines of the Johnson farm, the flames had been blotted out, and the place was ringed with a row of human skeletons, all but one of which had its head still intact. That one exception was the skeleton of the late Professor Mordecai Miller of Harvard; *his* skull was eaten clean.

## CHAPTER IV

### Appeasement

**O**N our silent return to town, Margery Avery met us at the door with a long face and tears in her blue eyes.

"Father's gone," she announced.

"Gone? What do you mean, gone?" I demanded.

"I mean exactly that. Gone, skipped, fled! The Governor phoned demanding father's resignation as warden. Instead of replying, he just merely kissed me good-by, and left."

She flashed a glance at her husband, and he added, "For some time I have thought his mind affected."

I stared first into Avery's clear-eyed virile face, then into Margery's smoothly chiseled features. Something was wrong here. Their reaction wasn't what one would expect under the circumstances. I sensed this, although I couldn't quite put my finger on it. But then, when do human beings ever react exactly as we expect them to?

I dashed into the house and made for the telephone, then hesitated.

"Go ahead and call the *Times*," said Margery. "We don't mind."

I stared at her for a moment, then shrugged my shoulders, and put in a call for Boston, collect.

While I was talking to the City Desk, Margery and Avery tuned in on short-wave station 15.3, the Mist's "official" wave-length. As I hung up, they got the following:

We, the Mist, speaking. Now that we have added the mind of Professor Miller to our already composite mentality, we now know more about our own gaseous composition than the rest of the world will ever know. We are invulnerable. Why try to make war upon us, when all we wish is to live at peace with our neighbors?

If you refuse to make peace, then it is you who have become the aggressors, and we shall be reluctantly compelled to retaliate with whatever weapons are at our command. We can match frightfulness with frightfulness, if that be what the world wishes.

But, if our extremely reasonable terms are met, we shall take over no more territory. We, the Mist, have spoken.

Paul Avery squared his broad shoulders. "Well," he announced, "this confirms what I have suspected for some time. For years the Mist led a low state of almost vegetative existence in the bottom of the Richard's Woods hollow, feeding on plant life and on the bodies and minds of small animals and birds and insects. Then, by accident, Spike Torri stumbled into its maw.

"Now, at last, the Mist possessed a human mind, the most brilliant though depraved brain in American gangsterdom. Led by this distorted mentality, this Thing swept out of its hollow, attacked the State Penitentiary and absorbed the minds of all the other criminals there.

"But it was careful not to absorb the minds of any of those who were on the side of law and order; hence the untouched heads of Deputy Wagner and the prison guards. Professor Miller is just screwy enough that the Mist is willing to take a chance on adding him,

too."

"Well," said Margery, with a touch of sarcasm in her voice, "now that we know all about it, what are we going to do?"

SHE amazed me! So calm and unaffected by this revelation that her former lover had become an amoeboid vampire, a menace to mankind! But, then, I never could quite understand this girl.

Avery answered, "We *don't* know everything. We know merely the composition of its mind. Before a successful attack can be made upon it, we must learn the nature of its body."

Thereafter the press was filled with scientific speculation as to what the Mist was, how it was able to "broadcast," whether it had a voice and knew how to speak over a microphone, or whether by its very nature it could set radio waves in motion.

A few days later Paul Avery moved his own laboratory apparatus over from the now vacant penitentiary to a room in the Lawson house, and set to work to try to devise some sort of gadget for taking a sample of the Mist.

"For," as he declared, "we obviously cannot learn its real nature unless and until we analyze it."

"And even then," I said, "I wonder. What would a chemical analysis of the human body teach us of human powers and capabilities?"

Avery merely shrugged his broad shoulders. "We can but try."

To assist him with his work, he hired a gross repulsive person, introduced to me merely as "Old Tom." Scalp close-clipped. Face clean-shaven. No eyebrows or eyelashes. Lips pendulous and drooling.

I took an instant dislike to the fellow. He gave me the creeps. There was something elusively familiar about

him, which just escaped me. Avery said that Old Tom was an ex-convict who had formerly assisted him in the prison laboratory, and that I had probably met Old Tom in my tour of the place. He had been released, his term completed, just in time to escape being devoured by the Mist.

But this explanation did not satisfy me. A newspaper reporter learns to sense when facts are being withheld from him. And furthermore, I had the uncanny feeling that Old Tom's gimlet eyes were fixed upon me whenever I turned my back.

I told Avery that I objected to his having a jailbird in his employ.

"Who knows but what he's in cahoots with Spike Torri?" I added.

Avery replied, "I need Old Tom in more ways than one. Not only can he help me in my laboratory work, but he can also keep us in touch with the underworld. *You* will appreciate that—later." Nor would he tell me what he meant by that last crack.

Margery sided with her husband, and so Old Tom stayed on. He must have known of my objections, and that they had been overruled, for now his fat face seemed always to bear a leer of triumph.

Curiously enough, New York's underworld chose that very week to line up behind a new leader. Crime news reporters described him glowingly as a veritable master mind; a big, heavy-set man with a dominating personality.

One evening I found Paul Avery reading the papers. He looked up at me calmly, his finger pointing to the front-page account of New York's latest big shot.

"I told you his mind was affected," he said.

"What do you mean?" I demanded.

"Get on to yourself, Roy. That's Margery's father, and he's turned crim-

inal in a big way."

I looked at him as though he were insane.

"You're nuts! I never heard of anything so screwy in my life."

Avery regarded me quizzically. "Wait and see," he said. "Wait and see."

THE State made one more attempt to destroy the Mist. One of the largest bombing planes available was borrowed from Mitchel Field on Long Island, to try to blast out the yellow fog that squatted low on the Johnson farm. The press, but not the populace, had been tipped off in advance, and so I was there on the sidelines at the impromptu press gallery.

The Mist was unusually quiet that day, as the plane flew low above it on a reconnaissance flight. But it seemed to me that there was a tenseness and alertness to its quietude. From constant observation, I believed that I had learned to sense its *moods*.

After circling the farm once, the bomber flew straight across and loosed one two-thousand-pound bomb in the very center of the farm. A geyser of yellow gas, streaked with black dirt, spouted upward from the impact of the projectile; then bent suddenly in the direction of the departing ship. It lanced out with one rope-like tentacle, seized the luckless plane and yanked it down like a lassoed steer. Eager yellow fingers reached up from the surface of the Mist to meet the ship as it fell.

A moment later the Mist divided, leaving a narrow swath extending straight from the sidelines to the wreck of the plane. As we stared fascinated, yellow tentacles sprouted from each side-wall of the fog, reached into the cockpit and hauled out the struggling pilot. Holding the man suspended just off the ground, by one tentacle wrapped tightly around his neck, the Mist ex-

tended other tentacles and stripped the flesh from his writhing bones.

Horried, unable to help, I shuddered and turned my face away from the grisly scene. A gasping sigh in unison escaped the crowd of newshawks. I opened my eyes and turned back. The Mist had closed in again, and was quiescent.

But as we gaped at its blank wall of yellow, it parted once more, disclosing a crater of dirt where the radio shed had stood. Then rising from the ground, the Mist formed itself into letters of smoke, like those of a sky-writer:

"REBUILD!"

"Why should we rebuild?" someone shouted from the crowd.

The sky-writing oozed together again, and then reformed as:

"OR ELSE!"

We all broke, raced our cars to the nearest phones, and relayed this latest warning to our respective papers.

The reaction by the State authorities was immediate. Complete short-wave sending and receiving apparatus was rushed to the Johnson farm, and a courageous young radio engineer (under promise of ten thousand dollars anyway, and a substantial pension for his family if he should never return) entered a rift in the Mist, and rebuilt the station. The Mist permitted him to go and come without interference, as he brought in load after load of necessary materials. He was on the job for nearly a week.

From his reports, the public learned at last how the Mist, although possessing no voice as such, had been able to broadcast. For the Mist resumed communication with the world before the young engineer had rebuilt the radio shed's microphone. Thus it demonstrated only too graphically that in some manner, it had the power to set up an electrical disturbance in the

tubes, capacities or inductances of the Johnson short-wave set.\*

FINALLY the young radioman shouted, "One more trip, and it will be finished." He emerged from the cleft which stretched from the newly built shed to the edge of the farm. Then he shouted back:

"I fooled you, Mist. The radio set is complete and in working order; and I have escaped you!"

The cleft closed together with a snap, and from the already tuned loudspeakers set up in the press gallery, there intoned the voice of Spike Torri:

"That act of bravado was unnecessary. If he had trusted us, what is about to happen would not take place."

The voice sounded quite annoyed, it seemed to me. And that night the young electrician, his wife and their baby daughter died horribly in their beds, stripped of all their flesh—except the heads.

This latest outrage convinced the State authorities that no one was safe. So Governor Maverick promptly entered into an agreement with the Mist, whereby the Mist was to keep within the confines of its present territory, and was to be fed cattle at State expense, as long as it did so.

## CHAPTER V

### The Antidote

THE events of the next few weeks can be summarized in brief. There

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\* In order for the mist to produce any sort of reaction in the Johnson short-wave set, it must have been capable of generating electrical impulses, perhaps similar to static. We might assume that the mist had the same power to produce positive electricity as clouds do, and thus cause lightning by attracting ground charges to it. Possibly the intelligence of the cloud was able to formulate static noises into recognizable words.—En.

was a sameness in their ominous monotony. Time after time the Mist oozed out of its agreed boundaries and occupied additional adjoining farms. Each time a new arrangement was solemnly agreed to, promising the Mist a larger daily supply of steers, in return for its solemn agreement now at last to stay put.

A special railroad branch was built up to the edge of the Mist, to accommodate the daily cattle train. The town boomed as never before from the thousands upon thousands of tourists who converged from all over the continent to see this freak of nature. A large semicircular grandstand was built along one boundary of Mistland.

Yet, with each disregard of former commitments by the Mist, with each further extension of fog-enshrouded territory, there were popular rumblings. There was increased insistence by a growing faction of public opinion, that some day this policy of appeasement would have to come to an end, that some day America would have to fight the Mist to a showdown, or become completely its slave.

Meanwhile the State Penitentiary had been reopened, and Paul and Margery Avery had been ousted from their State-owned home to make room for the new warden. My two young friends moved to a cottage, on a small island in the bay close to the mainland, and I moved in to live with them. Old Tom was there too, of course, helping Avery in his laboratory and doing odd jobs around the place, though he frequently was absent for several days at a time, on "business of his own." The nature of this business was not confided to me.

I saw very little of Avery and Margery, so busy was I on my reportorial work. I could sense that the two of them walked in the shadow of a great fear, and so were not very communi-

cative. Avery did not go near the Mist, but built device after device in his laboratory, only to discard them all.

"I want to be sure in advance that it will work," he explained to me. "For I feel certain that our enemy will give me only one chance, and I can't afford to fail."

Meanwhile, New York's new Public Enemy Number 1 was doing all right by himself. He held up an armored car down on Wall Street, a feat heretofore considered well-nigh impossible, in view of the way the financial sector is policed. He organized a new restaurant racket, and the District Attorney's office nearly went crazy trying to get frightened restaurant owners to sign complaints.

So fantastic became his exploits, in fact, that he literally crowded the Mist off the front page. My paper was about to recall me to Boston, because the quiescent activities of the Mist no longer rated a staff correspondent.

But now I found, dropped right into my lap, a new source of copy. Old Tom, by virtue of his previous gangland connections, was able to give me tips about the activities of this new Public Enemy Number 1 well in advance of the stories breaking in the press. And so I stayed on.

But the Mist, jealous at being elbowed out of the limelight, demanded that my stories be suppressed. The Governor ordered me to stop. I claimed my constitutional right of "freedom of the press," and certain elements promptly threatened to run me out of the State.

"Pipe down!" Avery advised me. "I'm ready to give you some *real* news."

He led me into his laboratory, and showed me what he had devised.

IT was a strong steel bottle lined with shatterproof glass. Its mouth was

capped by an hermetic shutter, which could be opened or closed at will by an electric impulse sent along a pair of long wires, which also served as a tow-rope for the bottle.

With a vacuum pump Avery exhausted the air from the bottle, and then sealed it. All was in readiness.

I drove him out to the Mist in the car I'd bought. At his command, I turned the car around facing toward town again, and sat at the wheel with motor running. Avery approached the wall of yellow smoke.

Swinging the bottle round and round his head by its wire rope, he let go and launched it far into the midst of the Mist. Click! Click! He pressed two electric buttons in quick succession. Then he hauled in on the cable, hand over hand for dear life.

That portion of the Mist nearby seethed in angry confusion; then reared up over us, with pawlike knobs projecting from its upper edge, like a panther preparing to pounce.

Clutching his precious bottle close to his chest, Avery raced to the car and plunged in beside me. We were off and away. And after us, like a swirling tornado, roared the Mist.

It had taken the Mist several seconds to gather itself together after that first abortive pounce, and so we got several hundred yards head start. But now, although we were tearing along over the concrete at not less than eighty-five, the yellow smoke-cloud slowly and steadily gained upon us.

"We aren't going to make it!" Avery groaned, glancing back as I drove the car across the Simpson's Creek bridge and entered town.

I glanced back too, just in time to see the Mist halt abruptly at the edge of the creek, and rear up into the air like a cowboy's horse reined suddenly back onto its haunches. Then it veered

to the westward, upstream.

I slowed down just in time to avoid running into an interstate bus.

We reached the cottage without further pursuit. Neither Margery nor Old Tom were anywhere about, but at the moment we had forgotten them.

Avery and I went at once to his laboratory. He was pale and shaking like a leaf, not so much because of the yellow death from which we had just escaped, as from the fear that his quest would prove fruitless.

With trembling hands, he sucked the contents of the steel bottle into a vacuumized glass container. Then he sank into a chair from sheer relief. For the vacuum container was now filled with seething yellow gas! The daring attempt had not failed.

Margery came in carrying a pail; and in response to her husband's frantic query as to where she had been, she explained that she had gone down to the rocks to get some sea water for her aquarium, Margery's greatest hobby.

Avery proudly showed her his capture. "Now to analyze it," he announced.

The sample of mist was now boiling more violently. As we clustered about it, it burst its prison asunder with a clatter of broken glass, hung above our heads for a moment, then fled and cowered in one corner of the room.

"Don't let it escape!" Avery cried in frantic tones.

**I** SLAMMED the door, and he pulled down and latched the only window. Ripping off her blouse, Margery stuffed it under the door and into the keyhole.

"We've got you, Mr. Mist!" Paul Avery exclaimed in triumph.

But his joy was short-lived. The ball of gas swelled to twice its size. Tentacles trickled out in all directions from its base. And then this synthetic

octopus began to crawl slowly forward.

Margery's blue eyes went wide, she clenched her two hands in front of her face and shrieked. The creature sprang upon her and stifled her screams, with one rope-like arm wrapped round and round her smooth young throat.

Avery glanced frantically about for some weapon, saw the pail of sea water, snatched it up and hurled its contents squarely at Margery and the beast.

*And there was no longer any beast there! Not a trace of mist remained!*

Margery sank dripping to the floor, and began to sob convulsively. But even as he sprang to comfort her in his strong arms, Paul Avery's brown eyes glowed with triumph.

"Margery, dear," he soothed. "Believe me, we've got it licked! We know the antidote. Salt water will destroy the Mist! The Mist doesn't even dare to pass over an arm of the sea. It tried to follow me home, but recoiled when we crossed Simpson's Creek. We are safe from it here on this island."

Margery stopped her sobbing, and smiled up at her husband with shining eyes.

A darkness suddenly enshrouded the room. I flashed a glance at the window. A thick yellow fog had engulfed the house. Wisps of yellow haze were beginning to seep in around the window.

Avery and Margery immediately sensed the situation.

"Salt!" Avery cried.

But I wondered. The Mist had got up sufficient courage to cross the channel between our island and the shore. Was it no longer allergic to salt?

"In the kitchen!" Margery answered. "There's a bag of salt in the cabinet."

She tore open the door, then recoiled in the face of the dense yellow fog gathered in the hallway.

Avery remembered a cup of salt on

one of the laboratory shelves. As tenuous tentacles reached in through the doorway to seize his wife, he hurled a handful of salt past her. The Mist retreated precipitately. Avery followed it with cup in hand, drove it from the house with pinches of salt, as Margery rushed for the kitchen and snatched up the precious bag of white ammunition from the kitchen cabinet.

Then before the Mist could return, we closed all the doors and windows. Next we mixed up a salt solution in tubs and pails and bowls, emptied out all the fire extinguishers and filled them with salt water, and packed all the door and window cracks with salt-soaked cloths. We were now prepared to withstand a siege.

"That's all very well," I objected, as we paused panting from our labors, "but unfortunately the Mist can eat wood. You saw how it destroyed the buildings on the Johnson farm. Undoubtedly it is gnawing through your roof right now."

To my surprise, Avery chuckled. "I'm going to phone the fireboat, give the Mist a real load of antidote."

**B**UT he couldn't raise "central." Gradually the realization dawned on us that, somehow, the Mist had cut the telephone wires. We afterward discovered that this had been very simply accomplished by eating away the insulation, thus permitting a short-circuit between the two twisted cords.

"Well," Avery declared, "I'll have to go for help."

We begged him not to, but he insisted. I offered to go instead; but, when I realized that the only way to keep clear of the Mist would be to *swim* clear to town, and when I took a good look at Avery's broad shoulders, I piped down.

So Avery stripped himself and

smeared his body with salt. Then, fire extinguisher in hand, he flung open the front door. The circumambient Mist recoiled, as Avery raised his weapon menacingly. Then he dashed out, and the yellow fog closed over him. We heard a splash.

Craning our ears, we fancied that we could hear a rhythmic ripple, as of a swimmer, growing gradually fainter, but we couldn't be sure—it might have been merely the waves on the rocks. At last silence. The Mist surged in at us again, and we slammed the door in its face. Once more we packed the cracks, and waited. Waited.

But we did not sit and wait. Extinguishers in hand, we patrolled the house. Holes began to appear in the inside walls; but we drove back, with squirts of saline solution, the yellow fog which filtered in.

Faster and faster we had to work, as more and more holes appeared. Finally we retreated to the laboratory, barricaded the door and waited.

Holes appeared in the door and walls. Frantically we fought. Our lungs became raw with exertion. At last we had to quit. Not only were we too tired to struggle any further, but our last supply of salt water was exhausted. Margery crept into my arms and whimpered, as we awaited the inevitable end.

But the intruding jets of yellow vapor ceased their infiltration. Withdrew, even. It became lighter out.

"Look, Margery!" I cried, dragging her to the window.

All around us the Mist was rising. It was drifting away. I could make out the lines of the shore; the bulk of a boat.

It was the town fireboat, all its streams of salt water playing upon our little island. We were saved!

Margery and I rushed out of the house to greet Avery, as the fireboat

docked and he sprang ashore. Soon the young couple were in each other's arms.

Far overhead hung an angry churning ball of yellow smoke, which finally shot off to the northwestward in the direction of the Johnson farm. The Averys' cottage looked as though it had been through the mill, but its burns were not too many to be patched up.

I went immediately ashore to phone the story to my paper, and soon the State was buzzing with plans for a concerted attack on the Mist with fire engines and salt water.

## CHAPTER VI

### The Trick

THE Mist promptly put a stop to these plans. That night the Thing went on a violent rampage. When morning dawned, the death toll of men, women and children, far and wide, mounted to over a thousand! The Mist must have divided itself into hundreds of separate units, in order to accomplish such a carnage.

Then came its broadcast ultimatum to the Governor:

We, the Mist, insist that you give a definite promise that there shall be no more attacks upon us. And no more encirclement. We are to be free to expand as and where we see fit. Cattle are to be furnished to us, adequate to our needs.

That part of our mind which was the mind of Professor Miller has devised a defense against salt water, so Dr. Avery's discovery has been in vain.

But as indemnity for his attack upon us, we demand that his wife Margery be delivered up to us with the next load of cattle. That part of us which was Spike Torri desires to blend his soul with hers.

Refuse our demands, and there will be another shambles. We, the Mist, have spoken.

Governor Maverick immediately acceded to all of these demands, except



one. To the honor of his memory, be it said that he refused to deliver up Margery Avery, declaring that he would not send one innocent human victim to death, regardless of what reprisals might follow such refusal.

That night the Governor died in his bed, a skeleton stripped except as to the head.

We rushed Margery to a cell in the penitentiary and organized a squad of guards equipped with fire extinguishers loaded with salt water. Margery was left alone.

"All of which proves," I announced the next day through my paper, "that the Mist's claim that its absorbed Professor Miller has discovered an antidote for salt water, its mortal enemy, is sheer nonsense."

Throughout the country, the citizenry began to arm themselves with salt-water defenses. And as if this were not turmoil enough, gangland, undoubtedly led by ex-Warden Lamont Lawson, struck simultaneously and effected an epochal haul of banks and jewelry stores.

The reaction of the Mist to the arming of America was surprisingly conciliatory. Over the air, it announced that for the present, it would refrain from further reprisals, if the U. S. Government would capture and deliver up to it Public Enemy No. 1—the man whose identity only Avery and I knew about. Incredible or not, I had to admit that the second-hand description of New York's new criminal master mind could only point to one man.

The Mist concluded:

For we need this criminal's brain to add to our already superhuman mind. The State can kill two birds with one stone by delivering him up: rid yourselves of a notorious gangster, and comply with our demands. I might add that this criminal genius was once known in this region as Lamont Lawson, warden of the State Penitentiary.

TO say I was startled would put it mildly. The secret which Avery and I had so closely guarded was now common public property. How would poor Margery take it?

Margery took it altogether too well. When I tried to soothe her, she became distant, almost impolite. I was so shocked, words failed me altogether.

At any rate, the Mist's suggestion captivated the public imagination, and soon the President, the Governors of most of the States, the Mayors of many cities, and even public-spirited private citizens were offering a rapidly snowballing reward for the capture of Lamont Lawson, dead or alive.

I came unexpectedly upon Margery Avery and Old Tom discussing the situation. What I heard was incredible.

"I've a mind to go after that reward. It's stupendous!" Old Tom was saying. "I am an old man, and those millions will mean a lot to those whom I love. Also think of the service to my country!"

"Oh, you dear, dear man." Margery cried, flinging her arms around the repulsive creature and kissing him full on the mouth.

They hadn't noticed me. I turned and staggered from the scene, my arm across my eyes. Margery Avery, conspiring to betray her father into a living death! I would have thrashed any man who breathed that such a thing was possible.

And now, how to warn Paul Avery without smearing Margery? This problem was still unsolved when a few days later, on my return from a jaunt to town, Avery, his large brown eyes shining, his broad young shoulders resolutely squared, beckoned me into his laboratory and pointed dramatically to an object on the floor. *It was Lamont Lawson, bound and gagged!*

"Now for the reward, and to save the

world," he declaimed.

I recoiled in horror. "You too?" I cried.

"Certainly. We planned it that way."

"*You planned it that way!*" I was absolutely thunderstruck.

"Yep—Mr. Lawson, Margery and I. We had you fooled all the while. Please forgive us. But there was too much at stake to trust even you."

Margery joined us. Avery stepped over to the bound figure and snatched off its black wig and glued-on eyebrows.

*Before me now lay—Old Tom!*

"Oh, so it isn't Mr. Lawson! It's only Old Tom!" I exclaimed in relief. "Serves the fellow right for his treachery."

Avery removed the gag and helped the bound figure to sit up. From it came the familiar booming voice of ex-Warden Lamont Lawson.

"Treachery, my hat! Never went away, except for excursions into gangland. Merely shaved my head. Posed as Old Tom. Never was any Old Tom except me."

"But why give yourself up to the Mist?" I remonstrated. "Surely this young couple would rather have you than all the rewards in the world."

"You know we would, Dad," Margery breathed. There were tears in her blue eyes.

"Yes, I know, child," he replied, looking up at her. "But I've made up my mind. There's no turning aside now."

There came a knock at the front door. As Margery went to answer it, Paul Avery hastily replaced the wig, eyebrows and gag on Mr. Lawson. Then the police entered and carted him away. We never saw him again.

I COULD not speak for a full minute. Finally I got a grip on myself.

"Paul," I exclaimed, "for God's sake, let me in on this before I go nuts. It—

it just doesn't make sense!"

He came over and put a soothing hand on my shoulder.

"Take it easy, old man. There really isn't such a great mystery to it. You see, the warden felt that Torri's death at the hands of the Mist was his own responsibility. He brooded over it for days. Then, that night when it made its first broadcast, Lawson knew that Spike Torri, whose voice the Mist was using, had been absorbed by the monster.

"That woke him up from his despondency. He realized, then, that the only way that he could come into contact with the Mist, was to so build himself up as a gang leader that the Mist would want to absorb him for his criminal mentality."

Margery broke in, "That's it exactly. You see, through his position as warden, Dad knew just what criminals to contact in New York. So he bought some padded-out clothes, shaved his head and eyebrows, and got some false hair and a pair of brows. You see, he didn't want to look too much like himself.

"When he was in New York, he used the fake makeup, which made him resemble his real self. When he showed up here as Old Tom, his nostrils and cheeks were distorted with putty, his face was smeared with dirt, he wore dirty old clothes and he removed his false makeup."

I was so stunned by the whole trick, as well as by the sickening certainty of the final outcome, that I couldn't say another word. I went up to my room, locked the door and for long hours sat at the open window, gazing out over the rocks and the sea.

## CHAPTER VII

### The Devil Disappears

GANGLAND, of course, raised hell. Deprived of the best brain ever to

come their way, they were like a flock of sheep without a leader. They actually became so brazen as to send unsigned telegrams to the new Governor, demanding Lamont Lawson's release. They threatened to charter a plane and bomb the State capital to smithereens.

Caught between two fires, the authorities were nevertheless more afraid of the Mist than of the combined forces of gangdom. A double guard was placed around the State Penitentiary, and no rescue was effected or even attempted.

Knowing the Mist as we did, we fully expected it would decide to stand for no delay, but would invade the prison in search of its victim. Yet we miscalculated the Mist's colossal ego.

Everything, the Mist stated, must come off according to Hoyle. Lamont Lawson would have to be turned over to the Thing after an appropriate official ceremony on the Johnson farm!

That was too much for me. I got the City Desk on the phone.

"Dan, this is Sherman. Listen—send me out a relief on this Mist business, will you? Honest, I can't take it any more. I can't stand to see Lawson being swallowed up like that . . ."

There was an awkward silence. Then I heard, "You can have a month's vacation, Roy. After that crazy ceremony. But you knew Lawson, you admired him, and you're the man who's got to cover his last bow. Write anything you like—we'll print it."

So it finally came off, two days later. Paul and Margery Avery went out alone to sit on the rocks, their hands clasped tightly together. The reaction had set in now. They realized they had been party to a magnificent sacrifice—and a ghastly tragedy. They sat there now, silent, tears streaming down their cheeks . . .

I took the little launch to the main-

land. Then I got my car out of the garage and drove to the Johnson farm.

There was a tremendous crowd gathered on the sidelines. Yet not a soul might have been there, so silent was every throat.

Promptly at ten o'clock an official limousine drew up. Out of it stepped Governor Maverick's successor and Lamont Lawson, in the custody of two prison guards. The little party proceeded amid packed silence to a little bandstand built for the occasion. The Governor took a last look at Lawson, standing there perfectly calm, an unfathomable smile on his face, and shuddered. Then he approached a microphone.

From my place in the press gallery I craned my neck forward, fascinated, sickened, incredulous.

The Governor raised his voice. "Mist, we are ready!"

The saffron, nebulous monster divided itself in a narrow cleft, whose opening was directly in front of the Governor's stand. While everyone strained forward, horrified, Lamont Lawson was led from the stand to the seething entrance.

The Thing spoke then.

We, the Mist, gratefully accept this gift from the people. With this new supermind which you have added to ours, we are now invincible. There can be no stopping our expansion. Lamont Lawson—step forward into my midst.

Down the narrow corridor Lawson strode, right into the very depths of the monster. He never faltered, he never once looked back. His heavy shoulders swung jauntily, and I could not be sure but I thought his fists were clenched.

The Mist resumed:

We, the Mist, shall no longer temporize or pretend. From now on, our bargains with mankind will be merely truces. You

shall purchase dearly each pause in our inexorable advance.

Our next demand is that we be fed Margery Avery, to be our wife; and Dr. Paul Avery, to feast on, all but the head. For no brain that is on the side of law and order shall ever pollute our composite mentality.

By then Lamont Lawson had disappeared into the bowels of the Thing. Like the closing of a trap the gelatinous corridor snapped shut. Suddenly the air was split with the Mist's angry voice—the voice of Spike Tórrí. The words were no longer impersonal, but strident, angry.

"Now look here, Warden! I'm running this show! Don't try to bulldoze me!"

**T**HE booming laugh of Lamont Lawson came back, confident, triumphant.

"Why, you two-bit punk! And the rest of you mugs that are in on this—get back in your holes, where you be-

long! We may all be disembodied spirits here, but that doesn't change a damned thing, get it? To me, you're still a bunch of rats and I'm the boss. Want to make anything of it?"

With a great convulsion, as of two wrestlers suddenly covered with a blanket, the Mist writhed inward on itself. Seething, churning, it wrapped itself finally in a compact ball. Then it rose slowly into the air, heading southeast.

I heard later that the yellow cloud-ball passed over our cottage, and halted just above and beyond the beach. Then, spreading apart, its tentacles formed into the letters P-A-U-L. Reforming, it spelled out M-A-R-G-E-R-Y.

There was a violent churning as the thing rolled inward again into its compact ball. There was a brief struggle before the last tentacle was sucked into the orange-yellow mass.

Then the Mist rose into the sky, heading nebulously out to sea.

Warden Lawson was herding his vicious charges into oblivion.

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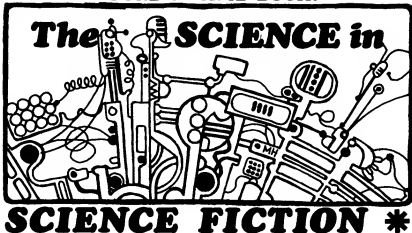
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**GREG BENFORD & DAVID BOOK:**



# **SCIENCE FICTION \***

## ***PLANET-BUILDING FOR FUN AND PROPHECY***

When I grew up in southern Alabama there was an oft-repeated story about two farmers who went into town one day to see the newest incursion of the twentieth century—the local radio station. The farmers had just bought a superheterodyne and spent every evening hanging on the words of the announcer, who introduced in a nasal twang a Beethoven symphony followed by a down-home tune, then a waltz, etc.

The farmers were astounded with the range of music they heard coming out of their speakers. So, first thing, they hurried over to the little three-room station and stood outside the control room, watching the lone broadcaster drop one disc after another on the turntable. Finally one of them turned away in disgust and said, "Come on, Zeke. Those radio people been foolin' us all the time. Why, he's *stealin'* that music, he's not makin' it himself!"

This month's column has a lot in common with that radio station. I'm stealing nearly all of it from a handful of part time

researchers, the men who have speculated and dreamed about what makes a planet habitable to men. This tiny area of applied astrophysics (or "planetology," if you have a taste for cumbersome words) has been created out of decades of weekends. Never is it the expressed aim of research—after all, how soon will we be able to apply it?—but a lot of little pieces of the problem have been done by men like Hoyle, Strughold, Urey and—most importantly—Stephen Dole.

Dole has written *Habitable Planets For Man*, a fascinating study of the subject, published by American Elsevier, Inc., New York. Any "hard science" sf writer should have a copy; there are a million story ideas in it.

Of course, some people don't see much point in filling a writer's head with such stuff. Character and plot and style are more important than background, they say. For ordinary fiction, I think perhaps this is so. But science fiction has broader scope, and more than that, I think most

people who value character, etc. so highly in sf are indulging in a bit of pure spatial-centricism—a long word that I just made up to describe the practice of assuming that the things you find in your immediate neighborhood are typical of the whole universe. This universe is *damned* strange, Horatio; just a few slight changes in our neighborhood (Earth) would make us seem twisted and alien. Kick up some more dust, raise the temperature, tilt the axis—and you have a new world.

So this time I'll continue last issue's discussion of solar system construction, narrowing my focus to the planets themselves. And just to keep things from getting totally out of hand, I'll stick to planets that fit within the vague boundaries of *livable-for-men*. No dessicated desert planets with a mere handful of microbes under the topsoil. No chlorine atmospheres (as we pointed out last year, a man couldn't see more than two feet on such a world at normal atmospheric pressures, even if he did carry his air along with him). No plankton in ammonia seas, no sulfur winds, no ice worlds. As we'll find, that still leaves plenty of room for imagination.

Let's start with gravity. Later on I'll deal with what mass the planet should have, because mass is a gross quantity, set by a number of requirements on the air's composition and pressure, rate of rotation, and simplest of all, gravity.

How much gravitational pull can a man stand? In a "g-suit" perhaps 5g, but only for two minutes. With no artificial support, the unromantic chicken can take 2.5g, but men don't seem able to suffer through more than 1.5g. A lot of fat Americans carry around that equivalent in extra weight right now, and of course it seems to kill them off early; you pays your money and takes your choice. If I had my choice I would pick about .8g for comfort and—perhaps—an increase in lifespan. This matter of living longer in lower grav-

ity is still just a guess. There is no evidence and as far as I know no real reason to think lower gravity makes the internal organs work longer. The heart must overcome internal friction to pump blood, not gravity. (It's a conservative system. The blood that falls quickly to the feet must then be forced back up, so you don't gain anything that way.)

While planetary atmospheres are not well understood, we do think that the only necessary constituents for a breathable one are oxygen and a touch of water vapor to moisten the throat. We don't need all the oxygen we get at sea level: men can probably live indefinitely at 23,000 feet, where the partial pressure of oxygen is about one third of the sea level value. Miners in the Andes live at 16,000 feet and work at 17,500 feet. It takes time to adapt to these places, but men can and have done it without apparent injury. Below about one seventh of sea level pressure, gas bubbles form in the blood stream, setting a clear limit.

Aside from simple breathability, the atmospheres of habitable planets must meet a standard of purity. Xenon is an inert gas, but at high enough concentration it is an anesthetic: an 80% xenon, 20% oxygen mixture will knock out a man in under five minutes. There better not be very much hydrogen around either, for it combines explosively with oxygen. Writers who talk about "faint traces of methane" that hang around from a planet's younger days had better be careful, because methane is quickly oxidized by any oxygen present. A world with much methane around would be very young indeed. Similarly, a livable planet must have some nitrogen to be fixed in the soil by lightning flashes or plants, or nothing will grow.

Next, oceans and water vapor. Earth is the only known planet with seas and we believe all this water came from volcanoes. Without the geological activity that brings

magma to the surface, a planet will not form oceans. We think seas are the very *sine qua non* of life like ours. We all came from the oceans, of course, and without them we would not even have fresh drinking water spread throughout the continents, since without large bodies of water there will be little rain. Probably Earth could have less water than it does and still be desirable real estate, but only four times as much as we enjoy now would flood all the continents, so perhaps the quantity of water is fairly crucial. The galaxy may host a fair number of rich, fertile planets on which the natives live a sandbar existence, moving from one shifting patch of land to another. If such a world was very hot, the humidity would be unbearable. A fair estimate, I think, would be not more than 90% ocean-covered, but perhaps not less than 30%. A fair amount of water is needed merely to keep the dust down, especially if there are high winds to erode the rock quickly.

There are a number of other standards we can require, too, but without a range of experience it is difficult to judge how probable they are. For instance, no life can withstand a constant shower of meteorites, earthquakes that come every hour, plentiful volcanoes or roiling lightning storms. A high rate of rotation probably gives a planet many tornadoes and destructive high tides (if it has a moon). In all these things Earth could take changes by factors of at least two or three, but imagine the social disturbance! Earthquakes would make freeways impossible (witness Los Angeles in the recent mild tremor), tornadoes would force construction of very heavy buildings (or light, cheap ones which could be abandoned at a moment's notice).

Now we come to more general properties. Mass is the basic measure of any planet, but putting precise limits on what is habitable is chancy. Oxygen is absolutely essential, but where does it come from, and

how does mass affect it? Free oxygen is breathed into our air by plants and all sorts of things take it back out again: oxidation of the soil (as may have happened on Mars, making reddish iron oxides), decay of plants themselves, breathing of animals like ourselves. It may well be that the crucial point is the decay of plants, which is stopped when these plants are buried and kept away from the air. The ocean does a lot of this, and in fact our oil fields are fossils of the oxygen-producing cycle of billions of years ago.

Larger planets tend to have more erosion and larger oceans. This is because of our old friend, the square-cube law: the water distributed throughout the interior (volume proportional to the cube of the radius) is deposited on the surface (proportional to radius squared) by volcanic action. Erosion is greater because of higher gravity and, if we want days approximately 24 hours long, greater shear stress throughout the crust. All these things tend to cover dead plants with either water or dirt, effectively removing it from the oxygen-consuming process. So large planets will have more oxygen and larger oceans, making life a bit more pleasant. As always, there's a limit to the virtue of size. Gravity increases, of course, which is uncomfortable for us. If the oceans get too large we're back to that sandbar world that came up earlier. And too much oxygen is bad for us—it causes blindness in babies if increased beyond about three times what we get at sea level.

Unfortunately, God has not seen fit to provide us with a nearby planet that is slightly larger than Earth, and at the right distance from the sun, so we have no way of checking these ideas and assigning definite numbers to them. Our earlier requirement that gravity be less than 1.5g limits us to 2.35M, where M is one Earth mass. One interesting possibility at the high end of the mass range—one I've never seen used

in sf—is that the atmospheric pressure could get very high and yet still be breathable. We live in about fourteen pounds per square inch of pressure. If the amount of oxygen in the air is steadily lowered, yet the pressure is increased, we can live in much higher pressures. For example, with only 2% oxygen and 98% helium present, we could withstand 150 pounds per square inch—ten times as much as we do now!

Here, though, factors of simple comfort come into play. What's it like at those pressures? Nobody knows, for really prolonged exposures. But even at lesser pressures the gas density becomes very high and, like flowing molasses, the fluid does not move easily in the air passages and makes breathing a noticeable and tiring effort. One researcher is reported as stating that at 8 atmospheres turbulence in the thick, heavy air is so great that one can actually feel eddy currents as it flows through the mouth. I cannot help but think that living under such pressure (literally) would quickly pall. Still, such a planet would make good background material and provide any number of plots.

At the other end of the scale, small planets must not be too weak to hold atmospheric oxygen. This requirement sets a lower limit of .2M, but it's a bit unrealistic because such a small planet would probably not be able to produce enough atmospheric oxygen. The best guess Stephen Dole can make is a limit somewhere between 0.4 and 0.6 Earth masses. Let's be optimistic and say 0.4M is the lower limit. Then we can make a chart:

	Small	Large	Mars
mass	0.40	2.35	0.11
radius	0.78	1.25	0.53
gravity	0.68	1.5	0.38

This compares the largest and smallest habitable planets, with Mars for compari-

son. All numbers are in terms of Earth-normal, that is, Earth would have 1.0 in each category.

If our estimates are right, Mars will be unlivable for men. Current evidence certainly supports that conclusion. Also, sf writers who talk about planets with comfortable surface gravities of 0.3g are probably wrong—unless, of course, one doesn't count on breathing the air there. Note also that even the largest habitable planet is not very much larger than Earth in radius, and in fact has only 1.56 as much surface area. If such a world necessarily had more water, its total continental area might actually be less than ours due to the great oceans.

Of course, mass isn't everything. Last issue I discussed the ecosphere surrounding a star, which defines the region in which life can survive. Roughly, the inner boundary is the radius at which water on the surface of an Earth-like planet would boil away, and the outer boundary is the point at which water would freeze. We can be more exact, if we like, starting from the fact that nearly everyone on Earth lives where the average annual temperature lies between 32 and 86 degrees Fahrenheit. To be sure, Eskimos and some Arab tribes think such a limit is for softies, but then, those people aren't likely to be reading science fiction or this column. Within those high and low annual temperatures, it is possible to have a habitable world that receives from 0.65 to 1.9 times Earth's sunlight. At the extremes only 10% of the world is livable, but people could survive on a belt a few hundred miles wide at the equator, say (a cold world), or perched on either of the poles if the planet were hot. The latter case, with widely separated belts of life which can evolve separately, should be worth a full novelistic treatment. For instance, men marooned in the belts without sophisticated technology capable of crossing the equatorial desert could



breed swift birds to carry messages above the blazing heat. The birds would have to fly thousands of miles without landing and would probably need white plumage to reflect away most sunlight. (Could they be a sort of organic dirigible, capable of inflating themselves with helium gas and floating most of the way? Hmmm. I'm sure there's a story idea in here somewhere.)

I've assumed that the planet has a rotation rate of about 24 hours, but that needn't be the case. We could live fairly well on an Earth with a 100 hour day, and one with a three hour one. Such variation will change the estimates of the ecosystem boundaries given above, but I think the most interesting idea we can pick up by varying the length of the day is the changes in gravity that would come from a rapidly spinning world. Hal Clement dealt with this in *Mission of Gravity*, though that was a world which men could never visit because of crushing pressures and gravity. The effect shows up on an Earthlike one, though, if we set it spinning every three hours. The sun would race across the sky and at the equator gravity would be reduced to 0.7g for a planet with an Earth's mass, simply because the centrifugal force would tend to push objects outward (much like a merry-go-round). As you walked from the equator toward the poles the effect would diminish, making for some interesting situations. The equator might be prime real estate because of the lessened weight there. Fat people would vye to settle as close to the equator as possible, and probably without worrying about the heat, either, because such a quick day would suppress extremes of temperature.

Speaking of extremes, I have neglected the chance that our world might have a

very eccentric orbit—that is, move in an extreme ellipse. If it does, summer and winter could come to both hemispheres simultaneously as the planet moved nearer and further from its star. If we throw in a bit of axial inclination, so that the world spins at a tilt to its orbital plane, things could be worse. Then an "ellipse summer" could coincide with a "tilt summer" (the only kind our Earth has) to produce a searing for one hemisphere at a time. Since "ellipse summers" come every year, one can imagine a barely habitable world on which people must migrate every year to the other hemisphere, in order to escape the extreme summers or winters: a permanent, unavoidable nomad society. With such a premium on reading the stars correctly and knowing the precise time of year, astrology would be the obvious, unchallengeable religion—because it worked!

That's actually the central idea behind all this speculation about other worlds—the realization that a change in man's environment will change man himself, often in subtle and startling ways.

We needn't even go to other planets to see this, either. Technology is deforming our planetary biosphere, perhaps altering the amount and kind of sunlight we receive, affecting the temperatures near cities, and a host of other things. We need prophets who can tell us what these alterations are going to do to our society and even our bodies. These prophets need imagination and a gift for broad patterns of thinking. The study of other planets, and the relatively slight changes in environment that could make those worlds so different for mankind, seems a good place to start.

—Gregory Benford

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his brain one from the other. Between the two there loomed an unbridgeable gap, and on the far side of it Macy beheld Hamlin, stunned, dazed, wandering through a charred and blasted meadow as lightning struck all about him. That sudden fierce blow had severed all connection between them just at the instant of merger. I am Paul Macy. He is Nat Hamlin. And the crashing of the lightning. Blinding white streaks splitting the sky. Is that Lissa up there? Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. She hurls the bolts. Crash! Crash! Hamlin tries to dodge. Across the great gulf drifts the scent of burning flesh. He is wounded. He moves more slowly. Crash! She has hemmed him in by a zone of fire on every side. Now Hamlin offers resistance. He shakes his fist; he shouts; he seizes her bolts and hurls them back at her. But each act of defiance brings redoubled furies out of the heavens. Her aim is deadly. Lightning spears his toes. Lightning licks at his heels. He hops. He dances. He screams in rage and then in pain. His arm is blackened by a bolt; he can no longer return her shafts. Now he writhes on the smouldering earth; now he shrieks for mercy. But there will be no mercy. Lissa is the avenging goddess. Hamlin will be destroyed. But what's this? In the moment of triumph she tires. She weakens. The bolts lose intensity, and Hamlin still lives! He regains strength. She cries out for help. *Paul, Paul, Paul,* *Paul.* Yes, he replies, from his place beyond the zone of combat. Hamlin has risen. He is hideously disfigured, he is maimed and ruined, but yet there is demonic power in him, and now he lashes back at her, trying to bring her

tumbling down to his own level. Crackling energies climb the sky. Help me, Paul! And Macy opens himself to her, letting her take from him whatever she must have, and he arms her so that she can return to the attack. Again her lightnings flash. Again Hamlin howls. His thrusts are beaten back. He cannot fight on. He falls. A bolt pierces his back. He twists and coils in frightful convulsions. Lissa transfixes him again. Again. He is burning. He is dying. The odor of charred flesh on the wind. The sky is a sheet of white fire. She is spending herself, emptying herself, to eradicate him. She is cutting him to pieces. Hamlin still moves, but now only in the random galvanic twitches of the dead. The meadow is a blazing pyre. He burns. He burns. He dwindles. He is gone. The sky grows still. Lissa can no longer be seen. A strange silence has come; a gentle cooling rain begins to fall. The air is sweet. The clouds part; the rain ends; the soft sunlight returns. There is no gulf between the regions of the brain. Macy crosses over. He sees no trace of Hamlin but only a dark place on the ground, a blackened scar in the grass, and quickly the grass grows to hide it, tall green blades moving swiftly in, sprouting tender new shoots that rise and meet, and soon there is no sign of destruction anywhere, although Macy knows that beneath the graceful grassy carpet one might find a layer of ash, if one chose to excavate. He walks away from that place. He is utterly alone. Lissa? he calls. Lissa? But there is no reply. Silence governs. He is utterly alone.

After a time he sat up and got carefully to his feet. The sense of being alone remained with him. There was a faint throbbing in his head, of the

sort one might feel if one were transported suddenly from the heart of some great city to the eerie soundless wastelands of the polar plateau, but otherwise he was aware of no after-effects of the battle. Except one. Hamlin was gone from him. That much was certain: Hamlin was gone.

He looked at Lissa. She lay as before, limp, glassy-eyed, self-isolated. Her bare skin glistened with sweat. The feverish look had left her, and, touching her side, he found that she was indeed cooler. Not only the fever had departed from her, though. For the first time since he had known her, Macy was unable to detect that look of terrible strain in her features, that expression of barely suppressed despair. She was calm. Her inner storms, as well as his, were over. But her calmness was of a frightening sort. She seemed vacant: almost entirely absent.

"Lissa?" he said. "Can you hear me?"

"Lis— Lis—"

"Lissa."

"Lis—"

"Lissa," he said. "Lissa is you."

"Lissa is you." Her voice was high, childish, fluting, toneless.

"No. No. I'm Paul. You're Lissa."

"I'm Paul. You're Lissa."

He sat beside her. He took her hands in his. Her fingers were very cold. Her eyes closed a moment; then the lids fluttered and she opened them and looked at him in a sunny, uncomprehending way, and she smiled. He said, "You've burned yourself out, haven't you? You just used up everything you had. To save me. And now there's nothing left but a husk."

"Husk."

"Is the ESP gone too, I wonder? Can

you still hear the voices? Do you hear them. Lissa?"

"Voices. Do you. Hear them. Lissa."

"You don't, do you? Not any more."

"No," she said unexpectedly. "I don't hear. Anything."

Her response startled him. "You can understand me now? The voices are really gone?"

A smile. A fluttering of the eyelids. A babyish giggle. "The. Voices. Are. Really. Gone." She had slipped away from him once more.

He searched the room for a telephone. None. He went to the door and looked into the hall. A phone out there, yes. Someone using it. Chattering away. All right, I'll wait. A few minutes. And then phone Gomez. Send your van, I'll tell him. Manhattan North People's Co-op, and hurry. Not for me. For her, for Lissa. Yes. Burned out, hardly knows her own name. But there's something still intact down deep inside her. Not much, but enough, maybe for you to work with, Gomez. No, you don't have to bother with me. I'm okay. It's over. Hamlin's gone, obliterated for keeps, gone, really gone. A total deconstruct. But the girl. Can you fix her, Gomez? Can you put her back together? It won't be like a reconstruct, exactly. You won't have to pour a new identity into an old body, just put an old identity back where it belongs. Okay, Gomez? You'll do it? Good. Good. And how long will it take? Five months, six, a year? Whatever. Just do it.

Five months. Six. November. December. Macy saw himself waiting at the main building of the Rehab Center. Snow on the ground, the branches of the trees heavy with whiteness, the sky a wintry blue. And Lissa, renewed,

repaired, coming toward him out of the inner wing. No longer a telepath. A brand new Lissa, stripped of her gift and of her torment. Uncertain of herself as she goes forth to face the world. Hello, he'll say. Hello, she'll say. An awkward little kiss. Button up, he'll tell her, it's cold. I've got a car. She'll look worried. Are we going into the city? she'll ask. My first day out. I'm nervous. You know what it's like, Paul, coming out. Sure, he'll say. I know just what it's like. But you'll be all right. New people, new lives. The second trip. Paul and Lissa, Lissa and Paul. Minus our old friend Nat. A great artist has gone from the world. How quiet it is inside my head. Five months. Six. November. December. Lissa?

She was giggling softly, and her hands were exploring her body, discovering this and that as a baby might. Lightly he touched her cheek. She wriggled in pleasure. You wait, he said. Gomez will fix you better than you were before. Macy peered into the hall again. The phone still busy. Come on,

get off the line, get off, get off! He didn't say it. He stood in the doorway, waiting to make his call, half expecting Hamlin to rise from somewhere, but Hamlin did not arise. Gone. Gone. My other self, my dark twin. He has left the world, and I have his place. Macy almost felt guilty about it. The merest flicker of regret. Farewell to you, Nat, a long farewell to Dr. Hyde. And I will go on through life without you. Wearing your skin, wearing your face. I am you, Nat, and you are nothing. Macy looked back at Lissa. She was drooling. As I must have drooled, he thought. Four years ago when I was very new. He went to her and mopped her chin. It's all right, he said to her without bothering to speak aloud. December isn't so far away. And then hello, and then we start again. Two ordinary people. Trip two, yours, mine. The second trip. The good one, maybe. From the hall came the click of the receiver. The phone was free at last. He went out to call Gomez.

—Robert Silverberg

(Continued from page 17)

been if I'd done it on my farm. Would have bankrupted me, for sure. Just the plastic foot alone came to more than I can make in five years of maximum productivity.

But they were real pros. They had my foot off, the stump cauterized, the nerves plated, and a nylon ball-joint in my ankle within hours after admitting me. The radiated healing process was as fast as they said it would be, and now here I was, walking just a little stiffly on my new plastic foot, making that easy low-gravity lope across the

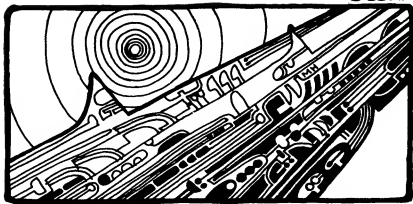
municipal parking lot for my pogo.

An hour later I was plugging the pogo into my recharger unit in the shed behind the house. The sky was brassy, and the fields green and empty.

Rose was waiting for me inside the house, sprawled amid a mass of dirty laundry on the livingroom couch, watching a porny cassette. "Well," she said, looking up at me with an empty expression, "you did say you'd be back, didn't you."

I was.

—Ted White



## FUTURE in BOOKS

James Blish: *THE DAY AFTER JUDGMENT*. Doubleday, New York, 1971. 166 pages, hardcover, \$4.95.

It is a pleasure to report that in this sequel to his *Black Easter*, James Blish has written a book in nearly every respect superior. It is not fair to call it a *novel*—by my approximate word-count, this small volume runs around 35,000 words, or a little over half the usually accepted minimum wordage of a novel—it is a novella, and barely that, since, once again, its structure is that of a novelette. But, taken together with *Black Easter*, it makes one complete novel, and a surprisingly satisfying one all things considered.

My quibbles are few. I don't like the sentence on page 17 (actually the opening page of the story proper), "The Judger was dead." And Blish's brief brush with erotic realism struck me as rather silly. But on the whole, this book seemed to answer most of my criticisms of *Black Easter*, and it was considerably more enjoyable reading.

The plot begins almost immediately

after the point on which *Black Easter* ended, and follows the main protagonists of that book via their separate paths to a thoroughly logical conclusion. Again, the resolution of the story in no way grows out of the actions of the protagonists: they are, throughout, only pawns of larger forces. But Blish has resolved the basic *situation*—the death or abdication (no one knows which, if either) of God—in the only possible manner. Moreover, he has done so with a marvelous literary touch which is at once esthetically satisfying from both considerations of prose and of emotional impact.

On the whole, the writing in this book is sharper, cleaner, and more vivid than in *Black Easter*. One reason, I think, is that Blish has given himself a better book to write. While most of *Black Easter* took place in cloistered places, with the action, as such, occurring off-stage, *The Day After Judgment* roams across the face of post-Armageddon Earth, from Venice to Pennsylvania to the American Southwest, and includes a stunning vision of a contained nuclear holocaust, as the remnants of the

United States Army attack the demonic city of Dis, in Death Valley.

In sum, then, *The Day After Judgment* successfully salvages *Black Easter*, and, if considered with that book as one novel, removes my largest objection to *Black Easter*. But it does seem to me a trifle unfair to the books' readers to sell each half of one successful novel as a separate book, at prices equal to those charged for most full-length novels. Perhaps the future will bring about a single volume containing both books and omitting the prologue to the latter, in which the former was of necessity summarized.

—Ted White

Samuel R. Delany & Marilyn Hacker, editors: *QUARK/1*. Paperback Library 66-480, 1971. 239 pages, paperback, \$1.25.

Rarely in our field has so much been spent to produce so little.

Armed with an editorial budget of \$5,000, Delany & Hacker were given the envious task of creating a prestige series of anthologies of new material for Paperback Library, in an attempt by that company to upgrade (yet again!) its line. Given a budget probably twice as great as any available to other anthologists and producers of periodical-style sf collections, Delany & Hacker have delivered the dud of the year. The feat is astonishing.

Subtitled "A Quarterly of Speculative Fiction," *Quark/1* is easily the most self-indulgent collection of its kind since *New Worlds* folded shop as a British magazine. It begins with the cover, a painting by Russell FitzGerald, which is notable for its tasteless depiction of a hypodermic needle—perhaps also an analog for a modern spacecraft—poised above an arm. When the front and back covers are spread open, it can be seen that the total painting deals with the interlinked arms of a black man and a white man, who face each

other, bound together by Union and Confederate flags. The rendering is crude—much cruder than FitzGerald's *F&SF* covers—and below the level used for his line drawings inside.

The flyleaf and the "editorial" both make a point of the fact that *Quark/1* is intended to deal in "graphics" as well as "speculative literature." The publisher can't be faulted—the entire book is printed by offset and superior in quality to the publisher's standard-line books—but aside from two selections of embarrassingly amateur drawings, there are no graphics as I understand the term at all. Indeed, the layout of the book is poorer than most: it looks totally undesigned, untouched by either the publisher's art director or any outside hand: thrown together by a printer. This sloppiness extends to the absence of any byline following the titles of each item. If you're curious about who wrote what, you must either wait for the story's last page or thumb back to the contents page to find out. (This problem has been dealt with in *Quark/2*: the contents page is also absent.) The opportunities for graphic design in a book printed by offset are enormous and limited only by one's talent and imagination. For reasons best known to the editors, every opportunity has been ignored. If I am to judge by the selection of drawings—twelve line drawings vaguely related to the cover by FitzGerald and "Six Drawings" by Stephen Gilden, plus a frontispiece by Gilden—the editors know almost nothing at all about graphics or design, and simply take what their friends, talented and untalented, give them.

So also, I am afraid, the stories.

They run the gamut from the superb "Dogman of Islington" by Hilary Bailey, to the incredibly bad "Carthing" by A. E. van Vogt. They include also several embarrassing pieces of would-be poetry, "Orion" by George Stanley, and "Getting

to Know You" by Link. If there is a dominant characteristic to the fiction it is exemplified by Thomas M. Disch's "Let Us Quickly Hasten to the Gate of Ivory," in which Disch painstakingly leads his characters and the reader along a long and detailed pathway to nowhere in particular: a kind of shaggy-dog story in which each detail is elaborated with finesse, but the point is anti-climactic. There is throughout most of this book a concentration on the literary use of prose without a corresponding sense of substance. Style transcends all.

Perhaps this should have been obvious from Delany's own writing, and it is certainly obvious from the editorial which graces less than a single page.

Simply put, it is a manifesto against the virtues and values of traditional writing, and will probably unnecessarily reopen the Battle of the Waves. In this remarkable document Robert Heinlein is correctly credited with coining the phrase, "speculative fiction," which he suggested in place of "science fiction"—but he is wrongly identified as having made the suggestion in 1936—some five years before the fact. As far as the editors are concerned, Robert Heinlein represents all that is bad in sf: "Personally, we are delighted that we have let him name us—the enemy." As nearly as I can tell, this is because for the largest part of his career, Heinlein had no truck with the sort of arty sophomoricism which could produce this sort of declaration: "Quark/ four times a year will present stories, articles, poetry, and graphics that demonstrate the strengths, the range, and the resonances of that acronym ["speculative fiction"] in search of a read-out."

As if to buttress this, Delany has included an article of his own: "Critical Methods: Speculative Fiction." It abounds in inappropriately dropped references to as many aspects of literature as could be managed, and reads like the thesis of a

pedantically dull but thorough English Lit. major. Drier in tone than Delany's past articles—most of which have appeared in the fan press—it is also stuffier and more stilted. Basically, he adopts a lecturing tone to admonish us that the choice of alternatives in speculative fiction doesn't lie solely at or between the poles of Utopia or Dystopia. We knew it already.

Despite this, there are some good stories and some interesting stories in the book. "The Cliff Climbers" is minor Lafferty, but "The Sound of Muzak" is the best story I've read by Gardner Dozois, whose previously published stories I've found impenetrable and unreadable. Greg Benford's "Inalienable Rite" takes a premise I regard as questionable—if immortality can be bought for a high price, will the poor so resent this turn that they will be compelled to assassinate the immortals?—and treats it with hard-nosed skill. Joanna Russ offers a work which, aside from a cryptic opening paragraph, has absolutely nothing to do with speculative fiction: "The View From The Window" is a self-conscious story about a woman teacher who seduces a younger man, and reads as if it was written for *The New Yorker*. It also reads as if she felt compelled to avoid any direct recitation of event and to offer new imagery for every commonplace observation. The prose does not entirely obscure the commonplace nature of this story, however. Among the few pieces of genuine science fiction is H. B. Hickey's "Gone Are the Lupo." It's told by an alien, and makes its own effective point despite verging almost into silliness in the style of narration. Among the remaining oddments of experimental failures are three moderately successful pieces of quiet surrealism: "Fire Storm" by Christopher Priest, "Adrift on the Freeway" by Ed Bryant (the best of his stories I've seen to date), and "Ramona, Come Softly," by Gordon Eklund, all three of which depend largely upon the



very conventional and linear nature of their prose and exposition. The Eklund is a minor disappointment: potentially the best story in the book, it slips away from him in its last pages.

As nearly as I can tell, these stories were simply assembled, and not in any real sense edited. Thus, crudities like "Between parched lips, she could see that his teeth were rotten," a sentence which demands

copyediting, slipped through. Had the book an editor less concerned with making it an egotrip and more concerned with his craft, this and many other embarrassments would be absent.

And maybe this rather sub-average collection would have been worth both the publisher's \$5,000 and your buck-twenty-five. As it turns out, it is not.

—Ted White

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Greg Benford: *DEEPER THAN THE DARKNESS*. Ace Books #14215, 1970. 191 pages, paper, 60¢.

This is Greg Benford's first novel, and in many respects an auspicious one. However, there are unmistakable signs that it could have been a better one.

The fault is not entirely Benford's. In order to fit the novel—which runs 75,000 words—into its standard book format, Ace crammed it unmercifully. All chapter headings were deleted, for example, and the chapters are not indicated as such at all. Instead, there is usually a one-line break—and sometimes not even that. On page 187, for example, the penultimate paragraph begins a new chapter and introduces a wholly new setting and scene. But because the paragraph follows directly on the heels of the previous one, with no break or indication of scene-change, the effect is disorienting and confusing for a reader.

However, Ace at least preserved the prose of Benford's entire novel, uncut in all other regards, including the divisions into four parts.

This quartering of the novel allows one aspect of it to stand out sharply and clearly: part one is by far the best-written.

Part one, "The Hand upon them, Strangled shout," is a revised version of the novelette which appeared a year earlier in *F&SF* as "Deeper than the Darkness." The original magazine version suffered

minor defects, all of which have been dealt with in the book version, to its great advantage. Had the remainder of the book also been subject to prior magazine publication, and subsequent criticism (as the novelette was), I have no doubt that it too would have shown the same degree of improvement. Greg tells me he plans to revise the book for eventual republication, and I think that when this happens the resultant book will be a major one, for exactly that reason. The latter three-quarters of the present book is, in essence, the first-draft of that eventual book.

However, it is not appropriate to review a book in terms of the book it might be. What we have to deal with here is the book which is.

It is, in many respects, a good one. It tells the story of Ling Sanjen, a half-breed with a caucasian heritage in a world—a universe, actually—dominated by the Mongol Empire. In a number of ways the Mongol Empire is a superior civilization to that most often visualized by western science fiction writers—and Benford develops it skillfully indeed. But the Mongol Empire is actually a cultural cul-de-sac, and humanity is beginning to stagnate. Even the technology is beginning to break down—the Jump ships are no longer as safe as they once were, for example, and the rate of loss is accelerating.

Into this Empire come the Quarn, totally alien, uncommunicative, impossible to deal with, and seemingly bent on the destruction of not only the Mongol Em-

pire, but the entire human race. Their major weapon is the Plague: an unguessable psychological disease which reduces most humans to a state of fear which borders on catatonia.

Part one—the original novelette—deals with the discovery of the plague and the spreading horror it produces. Taken alone, it is easily the best work of science fiction to come out of 1970—and, as I said, a considerable refinement of the magazine version, which was a 1969 Hugo and Nebula nominee in its own right.

Unfortunately, the remainder of the book is something of a letdown, in plotting and conception as well as in actual writing. The implications of part one—in terms of the personal and social disaster the protagonist faces on a plague-stricken Earth—are abandoned. Instead, Ling recovers—off-stage—from the plague and is shipped out to Veden to become Director of the planet. Here he begins a wholly new life, sans wife and children—victims who did not recover from the plague—in what amounts to a virtually new story.

Veden is an anomaly in the galactic Mongol Empire: a Hinduistic culture. Sanjen promptly plunges into a quick course in comparative religions, becomes embroiled with a girl (in a romance which occurs entirely too much off-stage), indulges in anti-social behavior for reasons less devious than at first appear, and finally becomes apprenticed to a Master of a new, grass-roots religion which ultimately turns out to be a front for the Quarn. The last quarter of the book is space-opera of a sort, in which Ling acts first for the Quarn, against the Mongol Empire, and then against the Quarn as well, ultimately bestowing poxes upon both houses and setting off for an unexplored part of the galaxy to Begin Anew.

There's a lot of good stuff in this part of the book. Benford is one of a very few

sf writers of the newest generation who knows his science, and the only one to make an attempt to revitalize some of the old, pre-Sputnik, clichés with an up-to-date approach. Just as Samuel Delany has refurbished the old *Planet Stories* plots (in books like *Nova*) in more modern mythic terms, Benford is refurbishing them with the realistic hard-science approach. (The scientific background of various aspects of the book have been dealt with in his column, *The Science in Science Fiction*, last issue.)

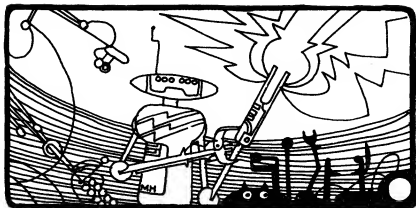
Unfortunately, he sometimes forgets when to stop, and instead the story stops for a lecture on How It Works which would better have been incorporated more directly into the exposition of the plot. Too often he tells, instead of showing. Nonetheless, the many details, from the effects of different solar radiation upon visual perceptions, to the "Flinger", do much to build the credibility of the novel. In Benford's science fiction, the hardware *works*.

The varying religious/philosophical doctrines used in the book also seem workable, and this is an equal accomplishment, since they are extrapolations of present-day eastern practices. Yet, after the tour-de-force of part one, the effect in later portions of the novel is somehow more superficial, hastier, and less convincing.

Part of the reason for this is that although the entire novel is told first-person by Ling Sanjen, the viewpoint is detached and distant throughout most of the sequences (parts two and three) set on Veden. We arrive at a good understanding of neither Sanjen's motives and purposes nor the actual sequence of events which occur. The scenery is often vividly described, but the action seems viewed from the wrong end of a pocket telescope.

The overall effect of the novel, then, is a mixed one. Part four returns to a closer,

(Continued on Page 121)



## ...Or So You Say

*Letters intended for publication should be typed, double-spaced, on one side of each sheet of paper, and addressed to: Or So You Say, P.O. Box 409, Falls Church, Va., 22046.*

Dear Ted,

My reaction to your May cover was mixed. The arrangement of type was very attractive, as was Jones' use of color. The magazine could be seen from the opposite side of my newsstand, a definite asset, especially considering the sort of places most prozines are tucked away in the majority of newsstands. Yet I kept asking myself, "What the blue hell is that egg-shaped thing with antennae?" That is, the cover was full of sound and fury, but it signified nothing. Don't you think your artists should add a little more content to their paintings?

*(Perhaps because the typography obscured a portion of the painting, or perhaps because it was cropped slightly to fit our cover proportions, you missed the painting's point: it is a spaceship—of Jeff's own*

*patented design—orbiting quite close to the sun. This was the second in a series of astronomical paintings Jeff has done for us—the first appeared on our January cover.—TW)*

Also, the cover stock is so thin that even with careful handling, it becomes wrinkled and grubby-looking. Would it be possible to get a more durable sort of paper for the cover? By the time they arrive on the stands, it is hard to find a copy in mint condition.

*(How do you like our new cover stock?—TW)*

Before I began this letter, I went back to look at the artwork, hoping for a comment hook in there somewhere. I then realized that the reason I hadn't paid the art much attention at first was the uniformity of it all. I must agree with Jerry Lapidus about the possibility of introducing some variety in the arrangement of the illustrations. The artists do the best possible with the form, but where one or two

of these panel-sized drawings would be interesting, a constant diet of them gets boring.

The "looking back" editorial was well done. I too enjoyed the Cele Lalli AMAZINGS and FANTASTICS, and you're doing your best to bring them back to that level. I think you've succeeded; I'm finally able to read an entire issue straight through for the first time in years. Yes, Cohen should be lauded for keeping the magazine alive at all. That is, if you didn't have to read the issues themselves.

While the LeGuin is as good as you say it is, the short fiction was all competent but nothing was outstanding. I suppose the best was your own "Growing Up Fast In the City." For a pleasant change it was understated, and I applaud your method of telling the story as an encounter between two real people and filling in the background from the dialog and some of the description. The future world was revealed "between the lines" as it were. Too many sf stories are in the "There's this fantastic civilization, see . . ." genre, and they turn out to be travelogues with cardboard characters spaced evenly here and there. You turned this "law" upside down, and congratulations.

Bob Shaw's story was fun, but minor. I was intrigued by the beginning, though. After all, how many science fiction stories start off ". . . it could make me seem pretty foolish if people learned that I got started on the road to the top because somebody took a shot at my grandfather's mechanical duck."

*The Science in Science Fiction*, each issue contains literally hundreds of ideas for sf stories. However, the conclusion of the May column, wherein they mention that to adapt to another world's calendar would radically change men into something else, is sobering. Gee, they just spoiled my enjoyment of about 20% of the

sf I've read. So long, colonists who are just re-worked American pioneers.

Ed Smith  
Route 2, Box 151-C  
Matthews, N. C., 28105

*It is my private conviction—unfortunately shared by rather few writers—that a good short story is actually the emotional nexus of a novel—and that a novel surrounds it by implication. This concept can be applied a step further when dealing with science fiction—by letting the "sf" elements exist by implication. That was my purpose in "Growing Up Fast in the City."—TW*

Dear Ted:

After the ghosts of St. Augustine neopuritanism struck with "f - - ed" in *Galaxy*, I almost cancelled all my prozine subs in protest. If SF really wants to be accepted as a legitimate literary genre, then it should be openminded enough to allow experimentation in all areas of human concern, sex included. If Aunt Effie doesn't dig a few widely used four letter words, then she can write her Congressman, but not—I fear—be used as a convenient scapegoat by prozine eds afraid of even a few outraged poison quill bombastards from the loyal rightwing nut. However, the May AMAZING refuses to avoid the use of sex as an integral part of its stories. Your "Growing up Fast in the City" meant more to me—both artistically and sociologically—when its female protagonist said "suck" instead of "s - - k" or "s - - -." As an honest extrapolation of future-tense society, the episode was made more real, more alive, more thought-provoking when you tried to—and succeeded in—presenting the characters as products of their particular social milieu, without the artificial circumlocutions of postSpironaut fashion.

Also, I was especially gratified to see

the female take the sexual initiative. Although Amercum mythology has ordained the male as the unquestioned master in sexual relations, this isn't quite the truth. It's not just Women's Liberation that suspects the schism between fact and fantasy in the Great Ameri\*an Wet-Dream (I can't decide between C or K these days—but this is self-censorship, not any imposed restriction; so there, Wertham.) In fact, the story relates better because you sought to give the woman more than a wooden whore's "one more time for the march of dimes" mentality.

Combined with "A Girl Like You" in the March ish, this new offering seems to presage more; perhaps a whole series. These near-future stories—although inevitably dated faster than most—have an aura of social concern and critique I find refreshing after 20 million AD opuses by van Vogt or Farmer. Not that I don't enjoy the far-future fantasy of such writers, only their profusion to the point that the near-future is neglected. After all, we're going to have to live through the Nixonian administration—a possibility I would've assigned to far-out SF in 1962. So, please, more with such characters as Mari-Ellin Agnew. . . .

Bob Shaw's latest short conjured pictures of ole Hopalong Cassidy and imitators to mind. There I was, again, in the six-year-old innocence of television cowboy heroes. However, Shaw's story wasn't quite camp enough to enforce this fleeting nostalgia. Instead I found it to be minor Shaw, if that isn't a contradiction in terms. Even so, he carried it off with a gentle touch until the end. Reynolds, still, was too slim a character to really touch me, even when he left the scene very ungraciously near the end.

"By the Book" and "Night-Eyed Prayer" do complement each other very well. The "Item(s) from (a) national conservation publication" are an interesting

way to highlight and expand the meaning of action inclusive to the storyline. My pessimistic outlook on the future of the race was reinforced by these stories. Perhaps, a few more modern day SF Roman-ticists will realize rose-colored glasses are no good if no one can make "one thing perfectly clear" anymore.

Yes, one last note, of all the features or nonfiction portions of the prozines available; I find your lettercol second only to Joanna Russ' book reviews in *F&SF*. It is really, truly amazing how many of your readers are articulate, non-left or rightwing nuts, with something to say. However, I wish you'd print some verse as *F&SF* does.

David Wm. Hulvey

Rt. 1, Box 198

Harrisonburg, Va., 22801

*Both "A Girl Like You" and "Growing Up Fast in the City" were part of a series—stories written (at his request) for Harlan Ellison's sequel to Dangerous Visions, and rejected by him. There were five such stories (before I simply decided that I was unlikely to ring Harlan's bell and gave up), at least one more of which—"Things Are Tough All Over"—will be published here, in either AMAZING or FANTASTIC. All have one thing in common: they present what I consider to be valid "dangerous visions"—and for that reason have not been easy to market elsewhere. But that's what comes of trying to write (or "slant") for a particular publication, isn't it?—TW*

Sir: (I conciously withhold the "Dear"!)

I have just read the May, 1971 issue of your magazine. I must congratulate you on not one, but TWO UNIQUE ACHIEVEMENTS unprecedented in my reading of thirty-six years of AMAZING STORIES!

Let me preface my remarks by explaining the above statement, which is somewhat misleading. I have not been reading AMAZING STORIES for thirty-six years! Rather, I started reading science fiction at the age of twelve in 1945, (I'll save you the trouble, I'm 38!) when I was given three shopping bags full of old AMAZING STORIES, (and *Thrilling Wonder*, and *Startling Stories*, etc.) dating back to 1935. Since then, I have read virtually everything I could get my hands on, including the offerings of several sf book clubs and subscriptions to various magazines. So I feel qualified to comment.

During these years I have developed and been using a rating system. I assign to each story after I have finished reading it, a value. (Makes it easier to locate the "goodies" when I want to review or refresh myself.) I use a ten-point scale, with  $\pm 0$  as the "average", a +5 for the very best, (only about five or six awarded thus far,) and a -5 for the very poorest, (only one so far!)

Now we come to the *FIRST UNIQUE ACHIEVEMENT: YOU HAVE JUST EARNED A MINUS SIX!!!!!!!!!!!!*

Simultaneously: *SECOND UNIQUE ACHIEVEMENT: I HAVE JUST READ MY FIRST PORNOGRAPHIC STORY!*

I am referring, of course, to your own "bastardpiece", (pun intentional,) "Growing Up Fast In The City", (Pg 74).

(*Further Debts!*)

-1: Nowhere in the story was there anything that could POSSIBLY be considered "science fiction"! It would even be difficult to call it "fantasy", unless one was relating something he had overheard at a group therapy session for perverted narcotics addicts!

-2: Not only pornographic and non-science fiction, it was a poorly written, inane story!

-3: Not only pornographic, non-science fiction, and poorly written, it was "self-

perpetrated"! (No doubt the ONLY way it could have ever seen print!)

Again, My Congratulations! I hereby nominate you for this year's "*FUGO AWARD*" *FOR THE WORLDS WORST INSULT PERPETRATED UPON THE FANS OF SCIENCE FICTION!* Anyone who would culminate forty-five years of leadership in the field of science fiction with such a display must surely border on the criminally insane! May I suggest that you seek competent medical (Psychiatric) help immediately! Or better yet, see your Priest, (Minister, Rabbi!)

Further, while you may have had the chronology correct in your editorial review of the forty-five year history of AMAZING STORIES, I cannot agree with your assessment of the value of the various periods. While I will agree that under the guiding hand of Cele Goldsmith the magazine flourished, (and please understand that I am speaking of the artistic merit and quality of the stories; I cannot assess the "success" of the magazine in terms of its financial status or circulation,) I dispute your claim of the Ray Palmer years as "at it's lowest ebb in terms of quality!" Perhaps the stories were not as "arty" as in later years when Bradbury or Pohl appeared, or as well constructed and intricate as when Heinlin or Sturgeon graced their pages. But they were "exciting", "entertaining", "enjoyable", and frequently, "thought-provoking!"

(*You misquote me. I wrote "its".-TW*)

It is only since coming under the mantle of the Ultimate Publishing Company and yourself, and your predecessor that the quality and value of the magazine has slipped. I cannot help but wonder if there wasn't some "Freudian" connotation or incident of "Divine Intervention" in the establishing of your offices in FLUSHING, New York!

It's a pity that in this day and age when the miracles of science fiction are about us on every hand, and such vast "new worlds" lie only moments away in the future; that in such a fertile field you have elected to *ignore the crops and cultivate the cow-chips!!*

I wish I had a subscription to your magazine so that I could cancel it here with. But since I don't, I can only light a candle in your behalf . . . (and apply the flame to the pages of VOLUME 45 NUMBER 1!)

C. V. Blaine  
Rt 2 Box 317C  
Eugene, Oregon 97401

*David Hulvey, meet C. V. Blaine (whose letter appears here sic)!—TW*

Dear Ted,

*[In reply to David Stever's letter in the March issue, concerning similarities he found between the first half of "One Million Tomorrows" and two other stories he had read:]* I haven't read any story which resembles "One Million Tomorrows." I feel I have a good claim to this idea because it was seventeen years ago that I suggested it to Damon Knight who at that time was giving me a little expert coaching in the art of sf writing. I was planning to do it as a novelette, but Damon wisely told me to wait till I had more practice and write it as a book. (Actually I meant to dedicate the book to him but forgot to notify the publisher until too late.) I doubt if Damon meant me to wait as long as seventeen years, but at least I can call on him to prove that I didn't lift the idea.

Bob Shaw  
Belfast, N. Ireland

Dear Mr. White,

Thank you for publishing Ursula LeGuin's "The Lathe of Heaven." It was

outstanding, fantastic, good and better than *The Left Hand of Darkness*.

Also, Jeff Jones' illustrations are among the best cover art in the SF field. It gives me a good feeling to see editors choosing cover art which departs from the big-boobed women terrorized by the giant monster school.

Thank you again. I very much enjoy AMAZING and FANTASTIC and I would like to personally apologize to you for mixing you up with James White all these years. I began to wonder when you published a short story that was very different in thematic emphasis than what I thought James White might have done.

Theresa Harned  
191 Frederick St.  
San Francisco, Calif.

*Actually, James White—whose stories we would not be loathe to publish in these pages—is a friend of Bob Shaw's and a fellow Belfaster. . . .—TW*

Dear Ted:

I was very impressed by the Pederson cover on the March issue; for that matter, I was impressed by the whole issue with two exceptions. The first is your own story: while it was well-written and certainly worth reading, I don't think AMAZING is the place for it. AMAZING is, supposedly, the home of science fiction, and science fiction only; your story would fit in well with the format of FANTASTIC, but not AMAZING.

My second gripe concerns the letter column, in particular the reply Richard Lupoff wrote to Sam Moskowitz. Lupoff, like so many people whose criticism seems to turn up in your pages (I include you in this comment), falls back on the following comments when his original argument is shot to pieces: "Gee, I'm so pleasantly

surprised that you're not reverting to your customary polemics and inanities. You're improving."

Now, not only is this an infantile cut on the party concerned, but it completely avoids any issue that might be involved. This is, of course, a clever way to puff yourself up without admitting that you might have been wrong—or worse yet, that the other fellow might have been right.

The May issue's Jeff Jones cover is appealing and infinitely superior to the January cover he did. His interior illo, however, looks like it was hastily scribbled. I did, however, like both the Graham and Kaluta interiors.

The same beef I had about "A Girl Like You" holds true for "Growing Up Fast In the City." This was an excellent story, one of the best you've written—but it does not belong in a science fiction magazine.

I was, naturally, very pleased to find no reprint in the May issue. The reprints are generally worthless; please continue this policy of deleting them.

"By the Book" by Coulson and DeWeese: there was a story in mid-1966 in *Analogue* by the same title. It was written by Frank Herbert, and at least had some good qualities, which this story did not.

Query: you mention that DeWeese and Coulson wrote a number of U.N.C.L.E. novels. I have an Ace catalog in front of me, and, unless their penname is "Peter Leslie" they must not have written any books in that series. (Other authors have written a number of books in the series, but I happen to know that they are not pennames.)

Scott Edelstein  
1917 Lyttonsville Rd.  
Silver Spring, Md., 20910

*DeWeese and Coulson wrote two of the Ace The Man From U.N.C.L.E. books, The Invisibility Affair and The Mind*

*Twisters Affair, both under the pseudonym of Thomas Stratton. I might add that other authors did use pseudonyms in writing for the series; for instance, "Fredric Davies," author of The Cross of Gold Affair, was actually Fred Langley and the late Ron Ellik. Peter Leslie may or may not be a pseudonym; he is a British author in any case.—TW*

Dear Mr. White:

I have just been re-reading "The Oogenesis of Bird City" by Philip Jose Farmer in your September, 1970, issue. From paragraph three, page nine, I read "(Off screen commentators explained that 18.28 meters was 20 feet. . . ."

Please inform Mr. Farmer that 18.28 meters equals 59.97 feet or approximately 20 yards.

M. David Johnson  
1308 Geringer Rd.  
Algonquin, Ill., 60102

Dear Ted,

Surprisingly I found a copy of the May AMAZING and as a result have completed Ursula K. LeGuin's novel, "The Lathe of Heaven." If I remember correctly, her previous novels have taken place in the same universe as *The Left Hand of Darkness*. It's good to see a talented writer branching out and "Lathe" is a good if not perfect example. The story was interesting and I was able to finish it in a few sittings. Unfortunately the idea of a mixed reality-dream world has already been done by Philip K. Dick in *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* and *Ubik*, but LeGuin was a little more clear at times than Dick has been. "The Lathe of Heaven" is a superior novel, but outclassed by *The Left Hand of Darkness*. I guess it's difficult for an author to top a previous work that has been hailed as a classic.

The shorts were good but not memorable. I've read worse.



Many thanx for the folio of covers. I always wondered what the first issue looked like.

A compliment and a gripe about the covers on the past issues and present issues. The artwork has greatly improved, but the ink is miserable. The March cover is a prime example. After reading it for a while I discovered the ink was coming off. Ever see a cover with fingerprints? Or fingerprints with part of a cover? I realize that you only edit, but a note to somebody would be nice. I dislike messed up covers.

You made a mistake yourself in reviewing Steranko's *History of the Comics*. The August 1927 AMAZING cover did not feature the first Buck Rogers tale. The first Buck Rogers tale was August 1928 AMAZING and the cover was for "The Skylark of Space" by E. E. Smith. Not having the August 1927 issue I don't know what the cover was.

Oh yes, welcome back to Virginia.

A last note. Your distribution is slightly improved for AMAZING but for FANTASTIC is miserable. Haven't seen a FANTASTIC since June 1970. And before you say: subscribe, I get *Analog* and *F&SF* by mail and some of those issues look like they were sent via Boskone or some such god forsaken place.

Michael Walsh  
9111 McNair Drive  
Alexandria, Va., 22309

*Our new cover stock should solve the problem of the smearing ink—a problem, by the way, which I've discovered plagues nearly all the so-called "slick" magazines and newsweeklies. Several people have called me down for the inaccuracies I added to the list Steranko had made; it wasn't Orban, for instance, who did the early interior illustrations for The Shadow, but rather Lovell. And you're right about the Buck Rogers cover. As for our distribution, I quite agree. I checked out every newsstand on which magazines*

*are sold in Falls Church last month—a more formidable task than might at first appear—and found that exactly four copies of the May issue of this magazine made it to two newsstands (both in drugstores). At the same time, almost one hundred copies of Analog were put on sale, in every single supermarket (the only sf magazine to go into the supermarkets, in fact) and on all other stands. Galaxy and If distributed about twenty to thirty copies, in six major locations (all drugstores), F&SF did not appear at all (it is not distributed within the Greater Washington area), and neither did FANTASTIC; the last issue which appeared here was the December, 1970 issue. I've seen subscription copies of our magazines, and they appear relatively clean, despite having only a paper wrapper; with our new, heavier binding, they should fare even better. It depends on your local Post Office, of course, but I suggest you give it a try and subscribe. You've missed some good issues already (but they're still available from our publisher). —TW*

Dear Ted,

On the March AMAZING:

Cover not too bad this time; certainly better than that totally non-entity cover last issue, Jones or no. It's not the name of the artist that attracts the eye, it's the artwork itself. Although I generally like Jones' recent work much more than Pederson, this cover simply looks better than the last.

I guess this will have to be more of simple acknowledgement of enjoyment than a serious letter. I've had the chance to read only a single piece of fiction in the issue, and with features—very limited this time, there really isn't going to be much to comment upon.

Except—that one insane story, "Servo" by Calvin Demmon. This has the potentialities to rank as a minor fannish classic,

if enough fans still read the prozines; "broasted chicken" is certainly a most fannish concept, especially as used in the story. Broasted chicken indeed! A couple of people around here are already talking about it as a honest-to-goodness (if that's the correct term) Hugo nominee.

Onward to the lettercolumn, though I do want to mention in passing the lack of both book and fanzine reviews. I understand that wanting to run good fiction, like the LeGuin story here, can sometimes necessitate cutting a particular feature for an issue or so. But to cut these two major features, especially considering that the fanzine review column is unique among all current magazines! As one possibility, I would have favored cutting the 14-page lettercolumn down a few pages, to allow one or both of these features.

If this adds anything to the discussion—the copy of *Seduction of the Innocent* in the Syracuse University library (a very poor one, I might add) does include the "Dirty" picture in question.

I have sworn to refrain from further argument with J.J. Pierce, and I don't intend to deviate from that now. I would like to comment to J.J., though, that the "campaign rhetoric" or polemics for other groups and factions has never called for a "Holy War" to stamp out the opposition. It isn't his particular opinions I care about; it's his lack of logic in discussing these opinions, and his apparent attempts to make his opinions the only ones acceptable.

Nothing else here, I'm afraid. A good issue, nonetheless, as most have been in recent days. Certainly AMAZING and FANTASTIC have been the most quickly read and eagerly awaited of the prozines among people I know. And perhaps you might have noticed any possible upsurge in sales, as a result of the consistently good work? I'm sure most of us would be interested in finding out.

Keep it up.

Jerry Lapidus  
54 Clearview Dr.  
Pittsford, N. Y., 14534

*Beginning this issue, The Clubhouse will alternate with The Future in Books. This was not an editorial decision. As for sales, see my answer to the previous letter. As long as we can't get our magazines on the stands in the first place, the quality of what we print won't help. If you detect a certain bitterness in that remark, you're correct. As I write this the news is still fresh that all of Doc Lowndes' magazines (The Magazine of Horror, et al) have folded, and that Galaxy has again gone bimonthly, while its companion magazines, Worlds of Tomorrow and Worlds of Fantasy have also folded. The picture is not much brighter in the book-publishing end, either. Editors are being laid off, publishing schedules are being cut back, and fewer new sf books are being bought. These are not good times for science fiction. We can only hope that sooner or later the economy will improve and that we'll still be around to be buoyed up again by it.*

—Ted White

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(Continued from Page 113)

sharper focus, but almost too late to save the book. One is left with a disquieting feeling that the novel as a whole is trivial—too cosmic in its final scope to retain the meaningful quality of its initial premises.

But this is, after all, a first novel, and it hints broadly at a major talent—one which will, hopefully, be revealed more fully in Greg Benford's novels to come.

—Ted White

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(Continued from page 4)

least of which is the way in which the lines have been drawn and the issues stated. Put bluntly, I am caught in the collision. I am not convinced by the arguments put forth by either side, and I have the strongest suspicion that my emotions have been toyed with by spokesmen for both sides.

In retrospect it has become clear that the entire issue was dominated by false claims and false appeals to our emotions. It is also becoming increasingly clear that the facts in the case have been conspicuous by their absence—at least from public discussion. I have listened to the SST's friends, and they have damned it. I have listened to its foes, and they have disgraced themselves.

John Lannan, in his column, "Washington Close-Up," in the Washington, D.C., *Evening Star*, for April 8th, had this to say:

"The most important implication of the SST defeat may lie in the fact that it is a portent of a dangerous trend, a Twentieth Century Luddite mentality . . .

"... The SST [defeat] was a victory for the fearsome, the shortsighted, the single explanationist—the modern-day Luddite—who kills off that which he fears or cannot understand. The SST may well have been rightly killed—but for many of the wrong reasons.

"Congress and the public, confused by the explosive growth of science and technology, are backing off from it, both in terms of support and of understanding. . .

"One key argument against the SST was its priority: The SST effort and funds ought to be channeled into other areas, said its opponents.

"What has happened?

"Sen. William Proxmire, one of the SST's most ardent foes, is already launching an attack on the Vertical-Short Take-off and Landing aircraft (V-STOL) which was highly publicized as a far better goal

than the SST.

"And Transportation Secretary John Volpe's proposal for a top priority high-speed ground transport demonstration system from Dulles Airport to McLean, Va., was killed last week.

"In education, research and development needed to effectively use computers and new psychological concepts is little more than a morass due to limited understanding.

"And in urban needs, technology and techniques which have been on the technologists' shelves for years still are being ignored while reactionary unions, builders and lenders cling to tried and true methods.

"On the pollution front, the federal government, while forcing multibillion-dollar sewage plants on the municipalities and states, is still failing to get its own house in order.

"And it has taken a single-minded approach to water pollution, insisting that phosphates are the cause of eutrophication, despite an increasing clamor by reputable scientists that phosphorus is but one of 20 or more essential elements involved and is far from being the controlling one. . .

"Congress and the public are so bent on checking science and technology's growth and potential threats that they have lost sight of their potential benefits in solving the problems the scientists and technologists helped create."

Senator Proxmire led the fight against the SST. On a recent television program he admitted that his original opposition to the SST had been one of governmental spending, and that he had seized the ecological issue only when it became apparent that his original tactics were not working. The ecological opposition to the SST was, then, from his point of view simply a superior weapon, and its actual merit was immaterial. In plain fact, the Senator has taken an obstructionist stance on all recent

aviation development, irrespective of its virtues or lack thereof; his opposition to the V-STOL development program is simply confirmation of this. For Senator Proxmire, "Ecology" was—and perhaps still is—only an effective red herring.

More and more over the past weeks I have come to believe that the confrontation of science-vs.-ecology in the SST debates was false, and that the entire ecological argument was largely without foundation.

I say this because those who have brought forth the ecological arguments have not done so from any cited facts, but with a blatantly emotional appeal. Their argument boils down to: "If we don't know the facts, how can we take the chance?"

This is a popular argument—and always has been. It argues for the known devil over the unknown; it argues for the status quo. It presumes that *change* equals *disaster*.

In the last ten years smog has ceased to be merely a joke, told at the expense of Los Angeles, and environmental pollution has become a meaningful part of his life for nearly every citizen of this country. The cited threat of pollution, then, has become a cheap and easy way to win points. Name almost anything not presently in use, suggest that it will pollute, and you can probably win its suppression. After all, killing the SST isn't like threatening to take away a man's *car*—his sacred right of ownership and individuality. What's a new airplane, anyway? You can't drive to work in it every morning.

The cheapest trick resorted to by the anti-SST people was introduced on the Dick Cavett Show by Arthur Godfrey, who is now posing as an environmentalist but has spent most of his life as a self-admitted "super-salesman" promoting wasteful and unnecessary consumption of a wide variety of consumer goods. "Why should we spend

all this money," Godfrey has asked, "just so some rich guy can get to Paris two hours earlier?"

It's funny he should ask. Godfrey owns his own airplanes—why, he even owns his own *airport*, in Leesburg, Virginia, thirty miles from here and convenient to his farm-estate. Godfrey is a rich man—and he got that way by pretending he was *jes' folks*, like you'n me.

But the entire question—as Godfrey undoubtedly knows—is another red herring. To begin with, the time-table is off: the projected SST would have cut an eight-hour trip to two and one half hours. From the commercial point of view, this would mean one and one half round trips vs. a single one-way trip. Or, to put it another way, three times as many passengers or freight-tons hauled by one plane in the same time period.

Actually, while the benefits for most passengers would be obvious, the point I have not seen or heard discussed *anywhere* is what the SST would do for air freight.

Presently air freight is still a younger brother to air passenger service, and as an industry it dates only from after World War II, but its growth over the last decade is phenomenal, and I have no doubt that air freight will overtake and surpass passenger service in the next ten years. The SST would have had an enormous impact upon air freight—probably much more than on passenger service. Consider the world market in perishable food, for example. Right now, Europeans are paying premium prices for some American produce. Iceberg lettuce is currently a hot American export. Oranges are now sold in U.S. markets which were grown in Israel. And so on. I predict that within two decades, foodstuffs—not just grain, but vegetable produce—will be a major export of this country. But only if adequately speedy freight is available.

As the world becomes more surely a

single viable economic ecosystem—as Buckminster Fuller's notions of world balances in power supplies and trade are inevitably realized—we will require this kind of fast freight more and more. *People* can communicate by radio, telephone, even television. But *goods* must be transported.

The SST is not the final answer to this problem, of course—no more so than was the popular propeller-driven airplane of the forties. Beyond the SST lies the HST—the hypersonic transport—a suborbital rocket which will place us within about two hours of *anywhere* on the globe. And in the HST, aviation and space-travel will merge: most of an HST's flightpath will be outside our atmosphere.

But if the SST is scuttled now, will we ever see the HST? The SST program was a decade old when it was scuttled. It was required to develop wholly new technologies—and those were to have been only a stepping-stone to the HST. Without the SST, is development of the HST likely?

But let's return to the SST, and the issues which surround it. What objections have been offered? The first was its *sound*. Both takeoff noise and sonic boom. We really have no facts on this at all—despite the fact that we have all the equipment needed to make adequate tests on at least one aspect, the boom. The result has been a welter of conflicting testimony. For every "expert" who prophesies nervewrecking booms is another "expert" who says the boom would, at the expected flying altitude, sound like only distant thunder. The only tests available are those conducted by the airforce, with low-flying fighter-bombers—planes and tests which in no way simulate commercial conditions. The army has a large SST-equivalent bomber—an operational prototype—but as far as I know it's never been used for these purposes. The British government is conduct-

ing tests along a western corridor of the British Isles, but with the Concorde, which everyone seems to regard as a white elephant, and again at lower levels. As for the takeoff noise, we don't know and couldn't possibly know until we have an operational prototype with working engines designed to meet this problem and can find out how effective they are. (The present state of the art is vastly more sophisticated than it was only five years ago—the 747's engines are larger, more powerful, cleaner and quieter than those of any previous commercial jet. And here military experience is of less value, since the military considers only efficiency and ignores pollution and sound levels in its designs.)

So we really just don't have the facts on the noise problems—if any. I have heard sensible adult men describe these problems in the most hysterical terms—the sort of hysteria I can't remember having heard since, in the post-World War II days of Pacific atomic bomb tests, doomsayers were forecasting tidal waves that would destroy our west coast—if a "chain reaction" didn't explode the whole world.

The same hysteria seems to contaminate another ecological argument (and we won't even discuss the most recent example: the "skin cancer" scare)—that of statospheric pollution.

This seems to me potentially more serious, but I think it has to be ranked fairly low on our list of pollution priorities. Granting the worst fears of statospheric pollution are realized, they are unlikely to have any effect upon a world already far gone on more elemental pollution—such as oceanic pollution. The latter will destroy our planet's largest resource for renewable oxygen—the plankton—and render a great deal more damage to our atmosphere than any number of SSTs might hope to do. The "greenhouse effect" which is forecast by enemies of the SST,

after all, is far more likely to occur when the oxygen level drops and the carbon dioxide level rises—as it is now doing, by the way. But even here, ecologists are uncertain about the actual results of such a “greenhouse effect,” and the forecasts run from another ice age to the melting of the icecaps. Only one thing is certain: if things ever come to this pass, we shall not be around to witness it. We—and our SSTs—will already be extinct.

When you consider our planet's history, this should not come as a real surprise. Until the advent of life on Earth, there was no free oxygen in our atmosphere, and the first forms of life existed in a methane-amonia atmosphere—or, more properly, in the seas beneath such an atmosphere. The bulk of the oxygen which we accept as our heritage comes to us courtesy of the carboniferous age—when plants flourished in a carbon-dioxide-rich atmosphere. We have made prodigious use of our oxygen, while wantonly destroying both the land and sea plants which continue to create it. If we go on, we will make our atmosphere unfit to breathe—but take heart: some plants will probably survive to eventually restock the oxygen. If you think in terms of the long view, it's not too calamitous. In the short view, the SST, as a potential contributor to such problems, probably ranks below the mass consumption of tobacco, and well below such dangerous pollutants as DDT (presently at work on ocean life) and the automobile (which is filling our air with hydrocarbons at a great rate, to say nothing of lead).

I haven't noticed any “Handbooks” attacking these real problems, however. Too many common people retain a vested interest in them. It's far easier—and as diverting as a Roman Circus—to attack a sitting duck like the SST.

Certainly the plane's proponents haven't hurt their enemies' cause. President Nixon has pushed the SST in exactly

the same fashion in which he shoved the ABM system down our throats, and with the same tactics he used to promote two incompetants for the Supreme Court. The Administration forced William Magruder into the Dick Cavett television show, for example, and dictated the terms under which he was to appear: without debate or opposition. Cavett himself made no effort to hide this fact, and the very heavy-handedness of the Administration probably undid whatever good Magruder hoped to accomplish.

Magruder had a series of ready facts available, statistics and figures which rattled off his tongue too quickly to note or contest—and whenever a question of any substance was put to him, he fell back upon a dogmatic recital of these facts and figures—astonishingly enough, in identically phrased set-speeches, time after time. In short, he avoided answering any of the questions which demanded straight answers. I believe that if I'd known nothing whatever about the issue, his performance would have convinced me—*against* the SST.

The problem is, the friends of the SST were worse than its foes. By Magruder's admission, they included nearly every short-sighted, narrow-minded special-interest group or lobby in the country, from the National Chamber of Commerce to the American Legion. They were responsible for a truly offensive series of newspaper advertisements—which suggested that the foes of the SST were commie dupes, if not sell-outs to Russia—and they threw so much heavy money around in recent months (in this, a time of economic hardship for much of the country!) that their lobbying must surely be judged an overkill. It certainly backfired badly upon them in the House—several Representatives said that the nature of the pro-SST lobbying made up their minds for them against the SST. And it obviously didn't sway the

Senate. Of course, the very fact of the "establishment" backing for the SST had solidified opposition to it among those who already look with suspicion upon the so-called establishment of this country. (I might say that this knee-jerk reflex—"If Nixon's for it, I'm against it"—is about as sad a sight as that of the super-patriot who swallows blindly anything a President says, because after all, "He is the President!")

What we ended up with was a polarization of opinion and a drawing of lines in exactly the wrong places. For many people in this country—and among Dick Cavett's audience, as well, if applause was any sign—the Good Guys opposed the SST and the Bad Guys were for it. Somewhere along the line the SST itself became lost in the shuffle, a victim to our well-orchestrated fears of rampant technology and ecological calamity. What was visible were two blatantly emotional appeals: "Support the SST if you love your country," or, "Oppose the SST if you love your environment."

That was neither a fair nor a logical choice.

The thesis I offered earlier about the growing importance of air freight in the export of produce was originated, in part, in a book I wrote two years ago, *Trouble on Project Ceres*. Nominally a "juvenile" sf novel, both its themes and its prose are such that no adult need feel ashamed to be found reading it.

The book was published less than a month ago, as I write this, and I would be proud to recommend it to each and every one of you, but for one simple fact:

The published version of the novel is incomplete. The publisher, Westminster Press, slashed the first two chapters from

the book—in the interests of "getting the story off to a faster start." The fact that it also ran some 65,000 words in its original form may have been another factor; the publishers of "juvenile" novels appear convinced that their readers won't sit through more than a maximum of 55,000 words.

I have registered my strongest displeasure with Westminster—I discovered the cut only when I read the galleys, long after any restoration was possible, or so I was told—but the editors of that company appear convinced that no author can write a book without their collaborative help.

As a result, I have asked a fanzine editor to publish the missing two chapters, and they will appear in two consecutive issues of *Granfalloon*, this summer. *Granfalloon* is published by Linda Bushyager, at Apt. B211, 121 MacDade Blvd., Folsom, Pa., 19033, and costs 50¢ a copy, or five for \$2.00.

While my quarrel with the editors at Westminster Press remains, I do believe that *Trouble on Project Ceres* is a strong novel, and quite possibly the best novel, "juvenile" or non-"juvenile," I have yet written. It lists for \$4.75, and can be obtained directly from the publisher, The Westminster Press, The Witherspoon Building, Philadelphia, Pa., if you cannot yet find it in your local library.

Should you decide to read both the novel and the expurgated two chapters, I'd like to hear from you, here, at AMAZING STORIES, for your opinion on the validity of the cut. It is rare that an author has at his disposal a podium of this nature when an event of this sort occurs, but, having just such a podium, I can do no less than avail myself of it.

—Ted White

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Edited by  
DICK LUPOFF & DON THOMPSON

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